

RAJA BHOJA

Amidst the many wars he fought, Raja Bhoja (11th Century A.D.), the ruler of Malwa, always found time to listen to the poetry of the gifted. Ballala, a poet in his court, has immortalised his patron in his work *Bhoja Prabandha* which is a romantic tale, written in Sanskrit, partly in verse and partly in prose. Ballala was interested not so much in history as in heroics. In his attempt to magnify Bhoja as a patron of the arts and letters, Ballala has ignored historical facts. The poets, Kalidasa and Bana, who he said adorned Bhoja's court, actually lived much before Bhoja's times.

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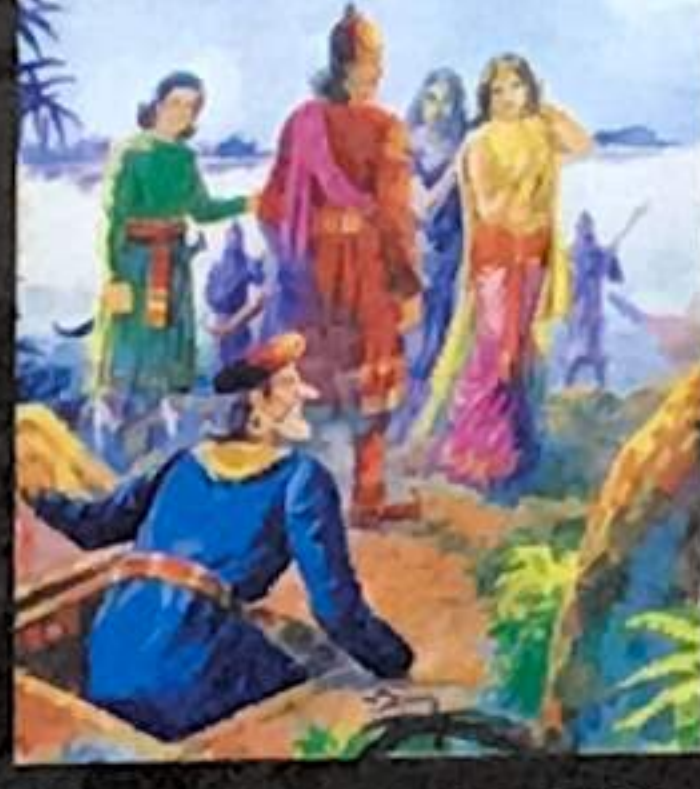
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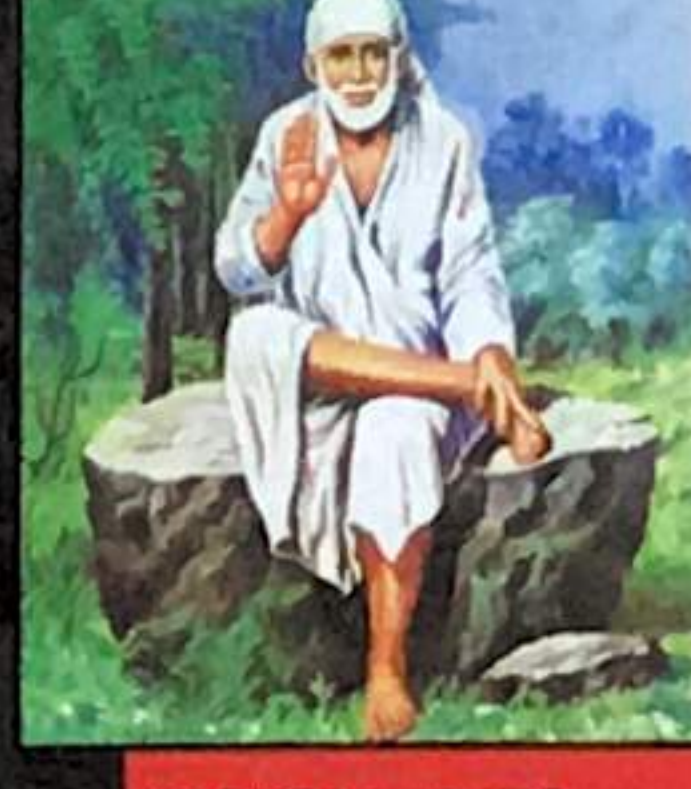
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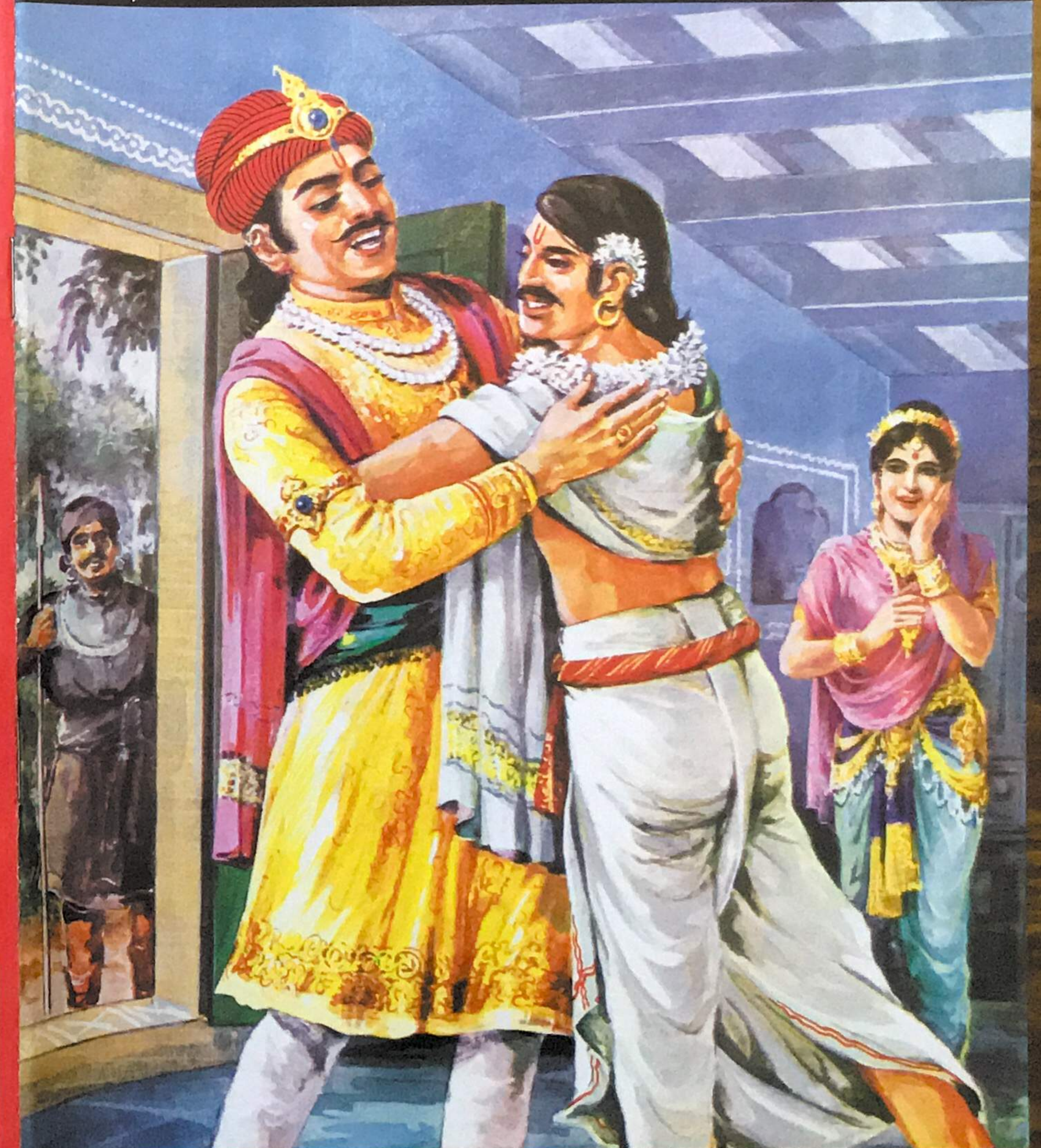
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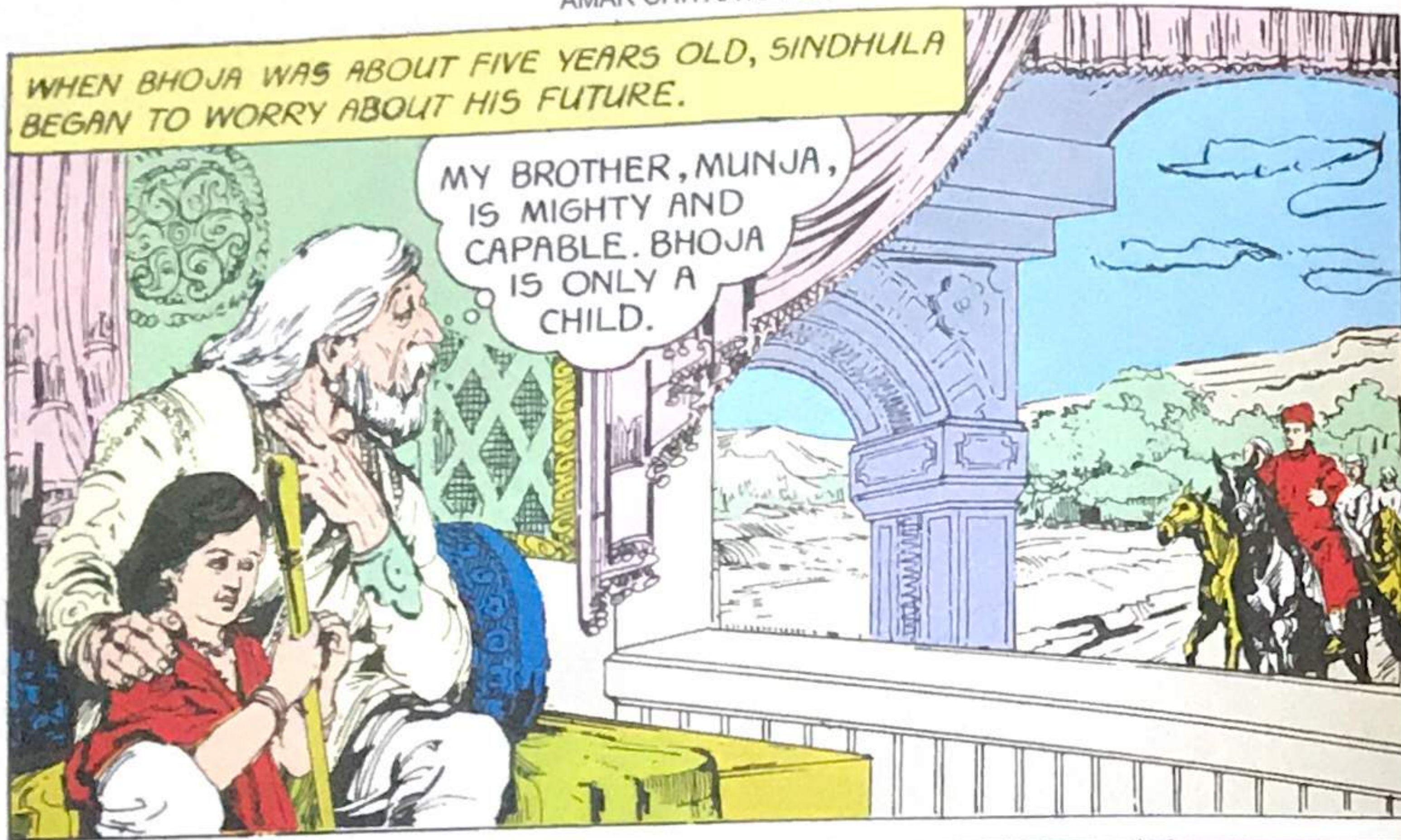
RAJA BHOJA



RAJA BHOJA WAS THE SON OF KING SINDHULA OF DHARA.*
HE WAS BORN WHEN SINDHULA WAS VERY OLD.

* IN MADHYA PRADESH.

WHEN BHOJA WAS ABOUT FIVE YEARS OLD, SINDHULA BEGAN TO WORRY ABOUT HIS FUTURE.

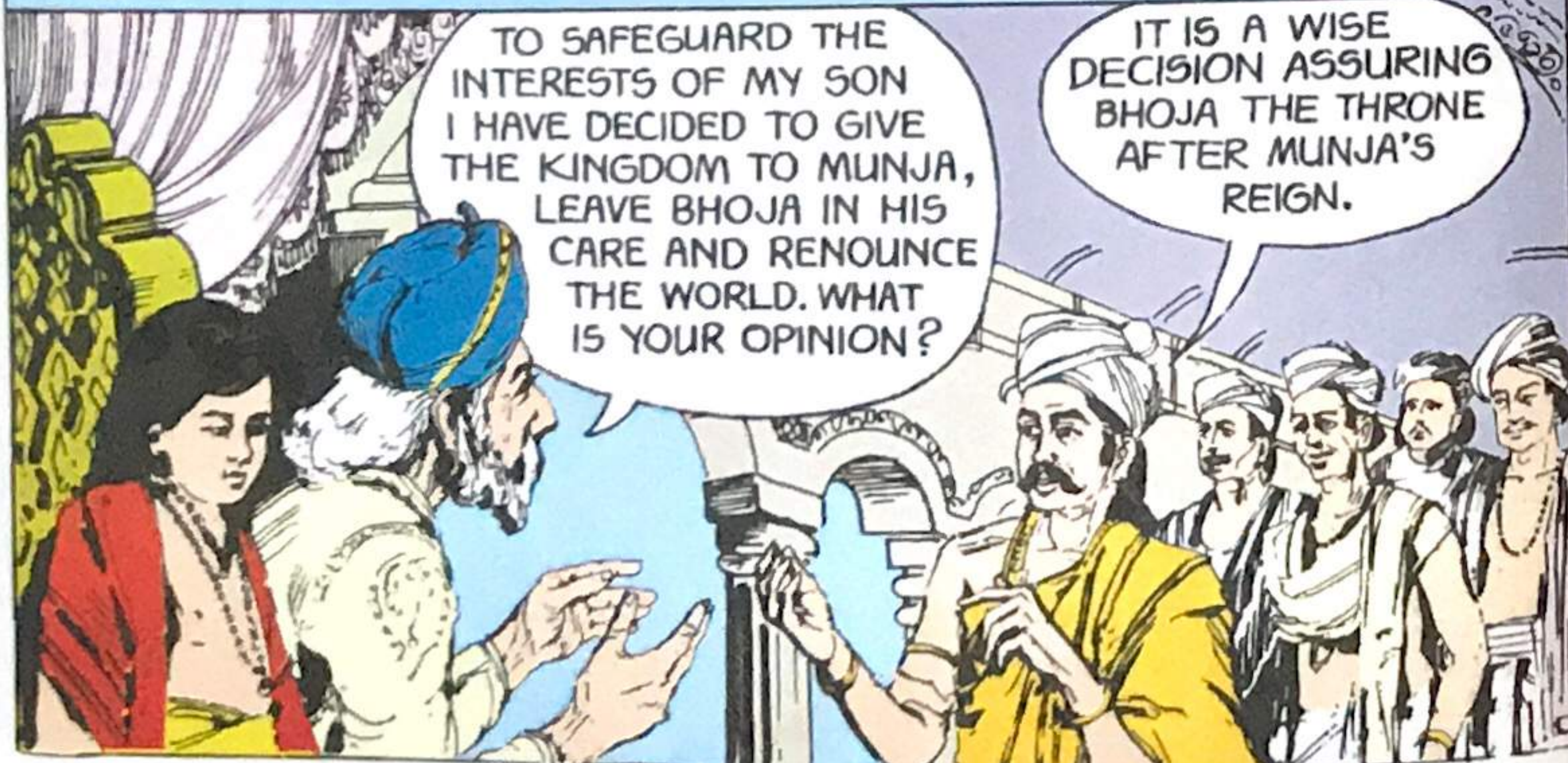


MY BROTHER, MUNJA, IS MIGHTY AND CAPABLE. BHOJA IS ONLY A CHILD.



IF I IGNORE MUNJA AND PLACE BHOJA ON THE THRONE, HE MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO KILL BHOJA FOR THE KINGDOM.

SO SINDHULA CONSULTED HIS MINISTERS, HEADED BY BUDDHISAGARA.



TO SAFEGUARD THE INTERESTS OF MY SON I HAVE DECIDED TO GIVE THE KINGDOM TO MUNJA, LEAVE BHOJA IN HIS CARE AND RENOUNCE THE WORLD. WHAT IS YOUR OPINION?

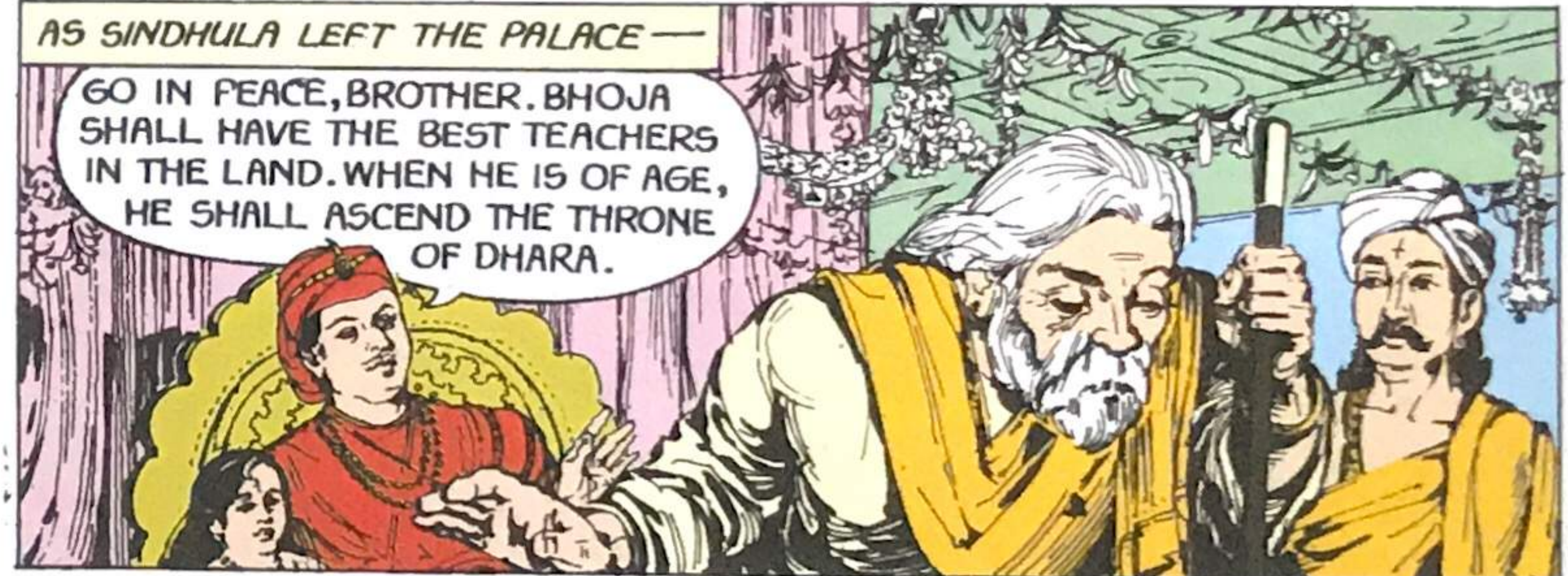
IT IS A WISE DECISION ASSURING BHOJA THE THRONE AFTER MUNJA'S REIGN.

SO SINDHULA GRANTED THE KINGDOM TO MUNJA AND ENTRUSTED BHOJA TO HIM.



BHOJA IS NOW YOUR SON. TRAIN HIM TO RULE AFTER YOU.

AS SINDHULA LEFT THE PALACE —



GO IN PEACE, BROTHER. BHOJA SHALL HAVE THE BEST TEACHERS IN THE LAND. WHEN HE IS OF AGE, HE SHALL ASCEND THE THRONE OF DHARA.

A FEW DAYS LATER, A BRAHMAN CAME TO MUNJA'S COURT.

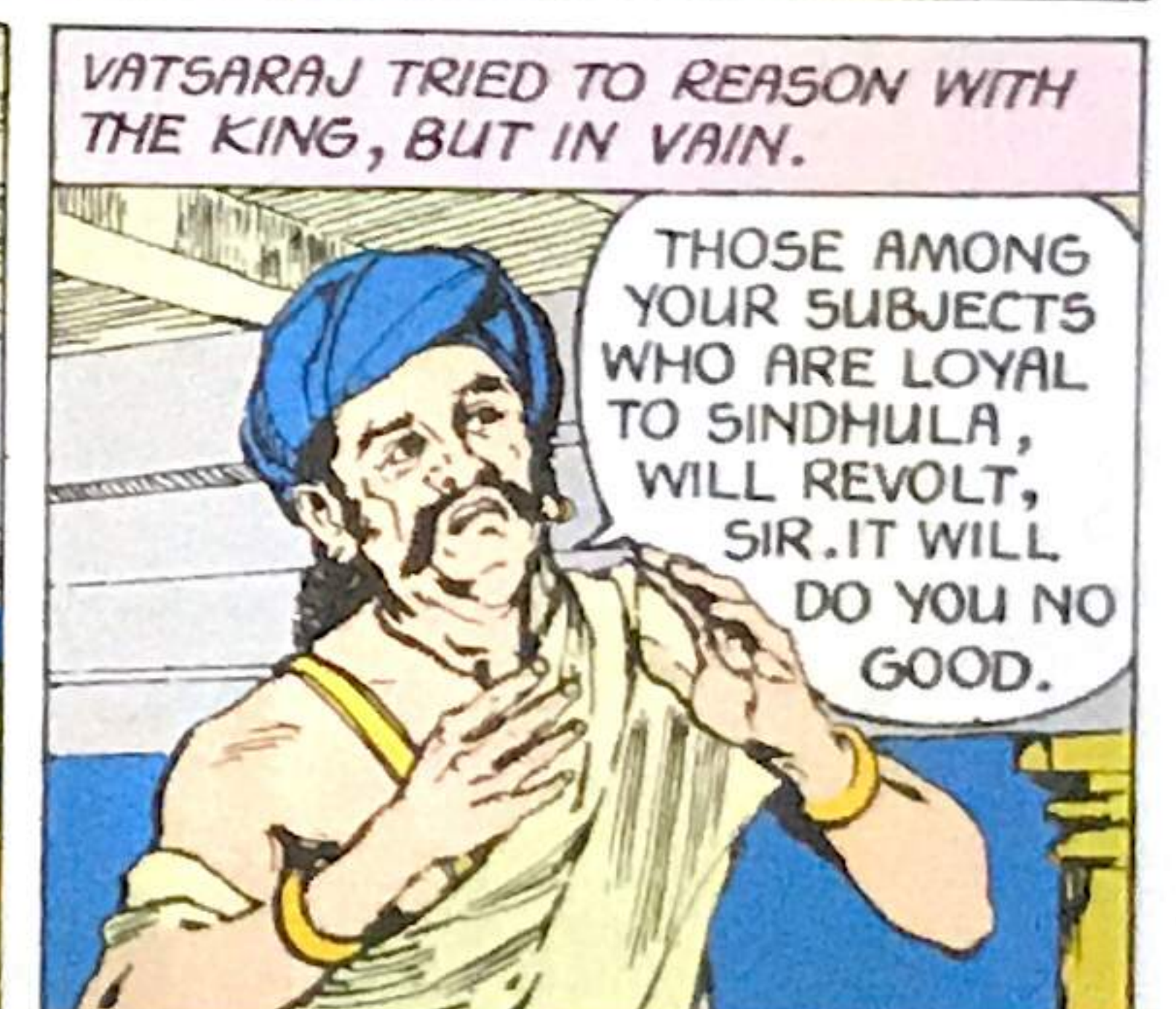
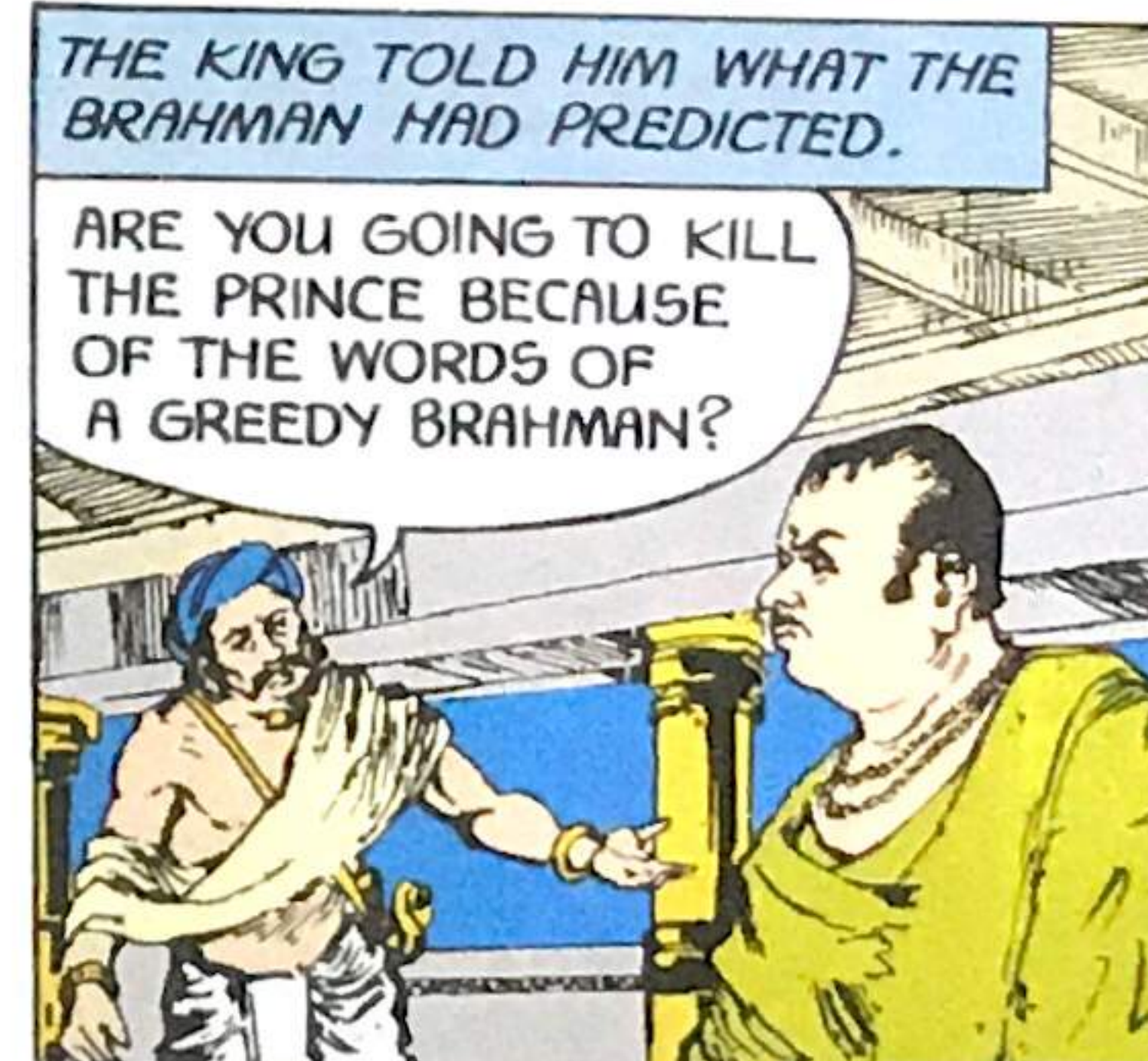
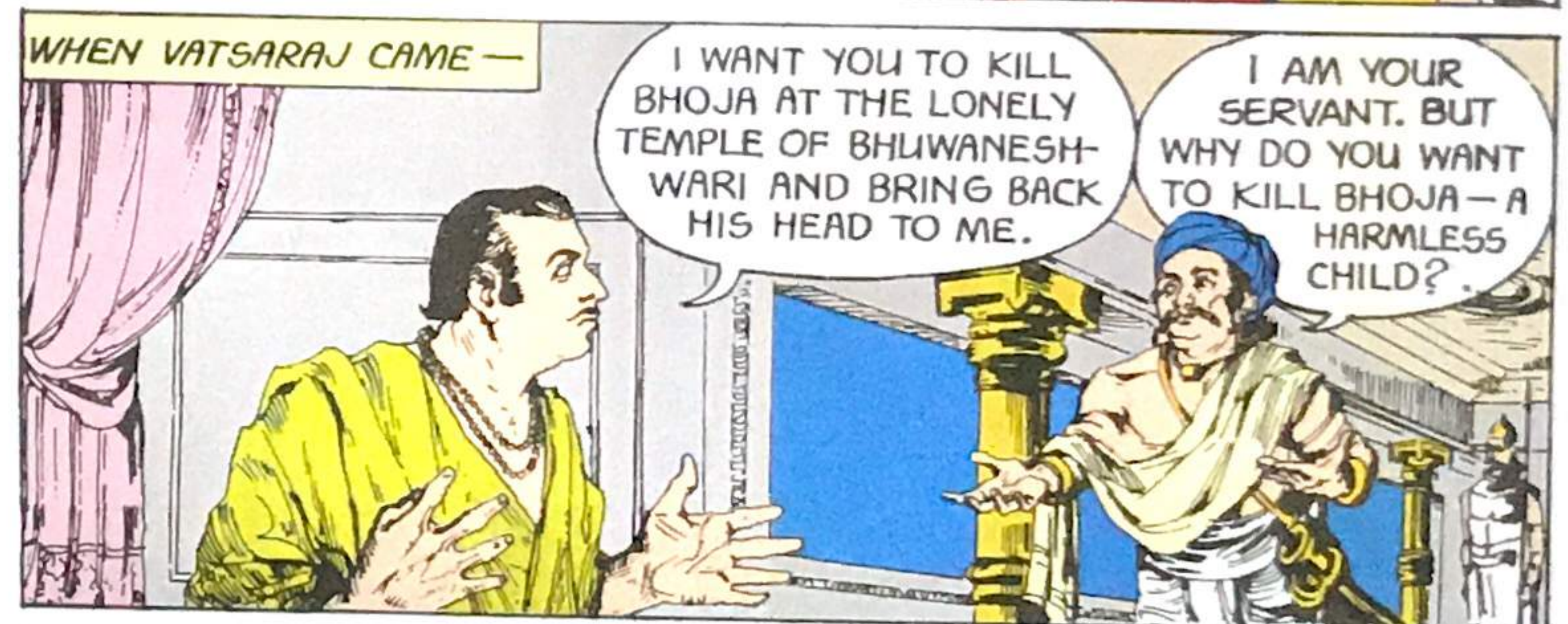
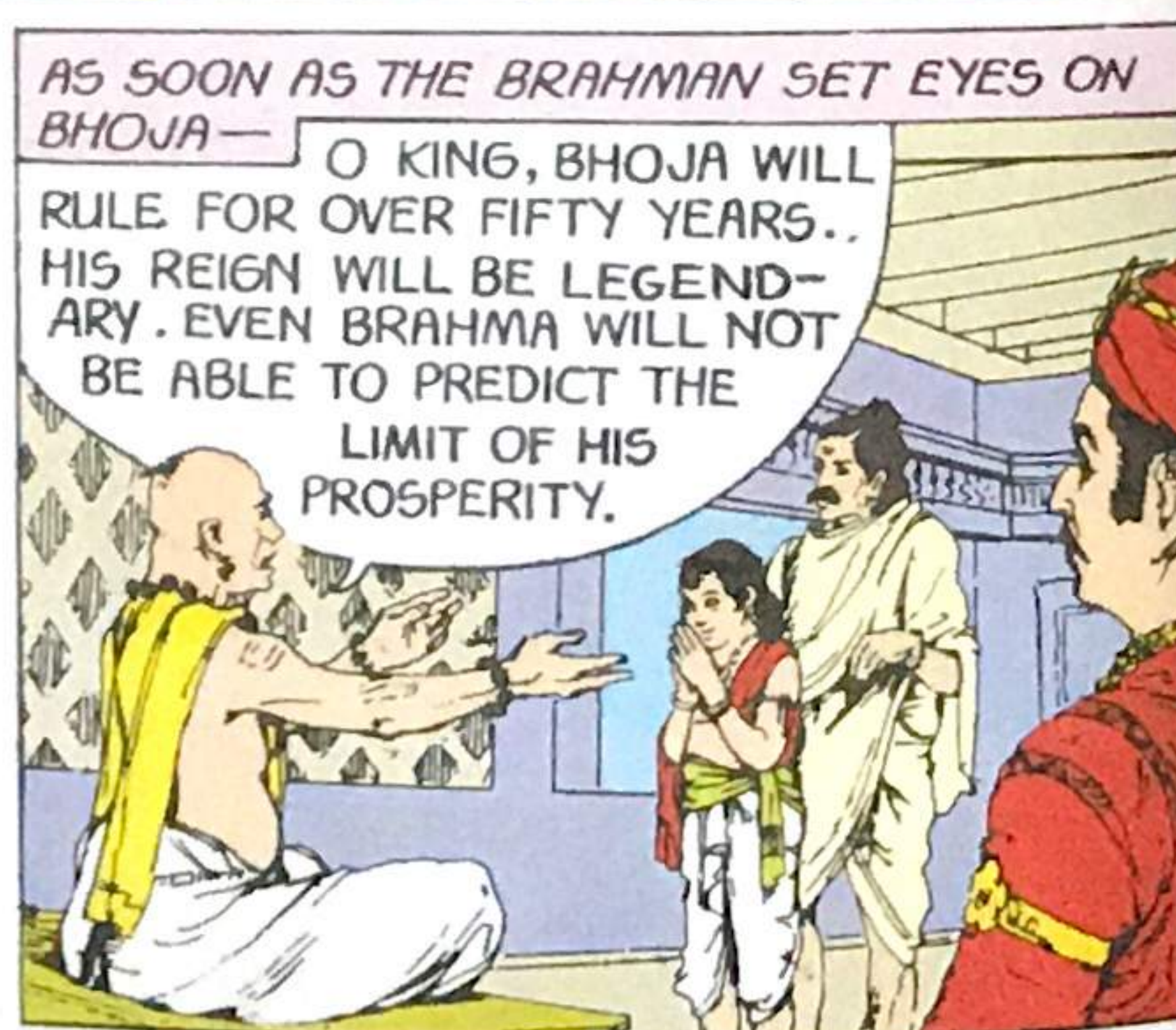
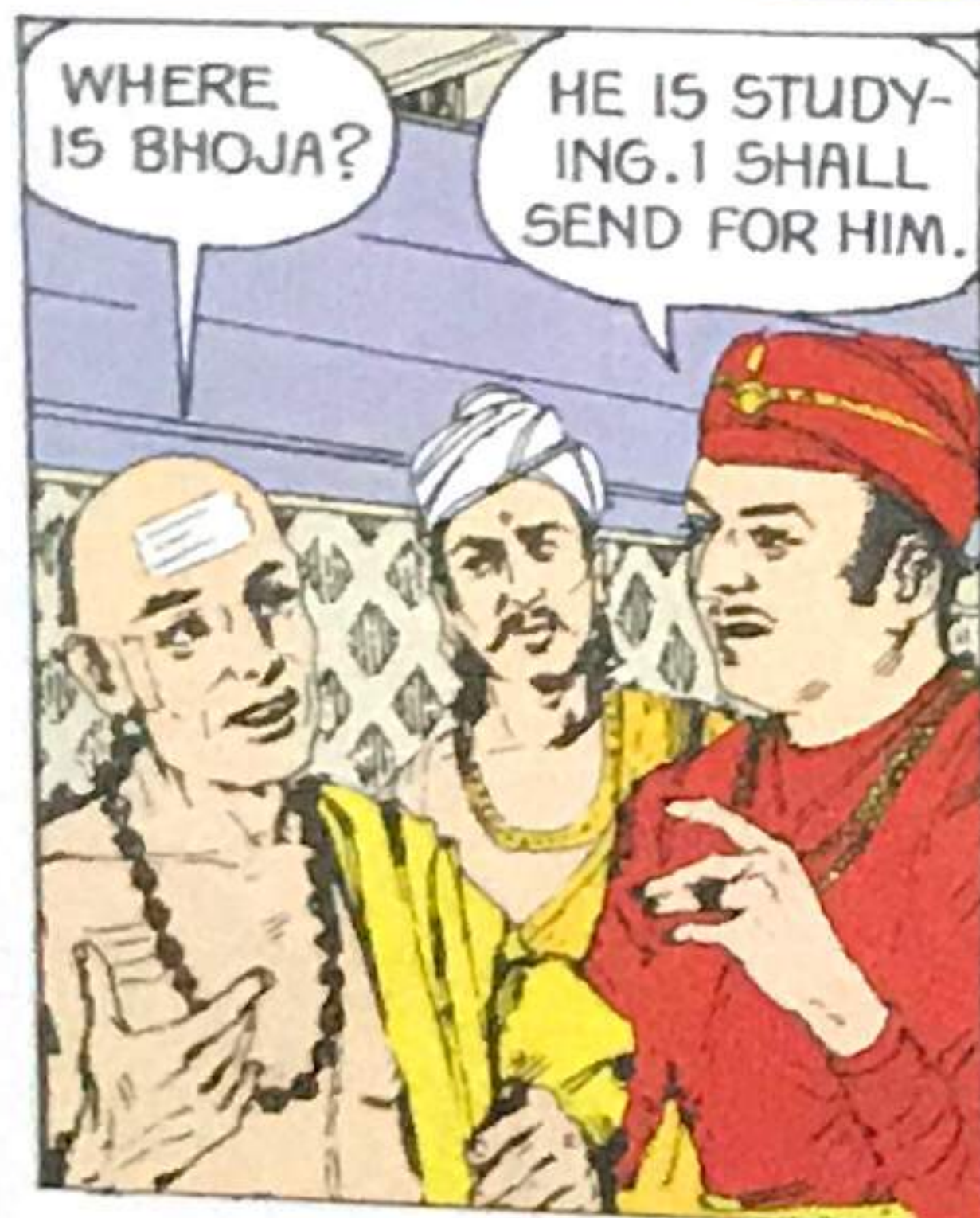


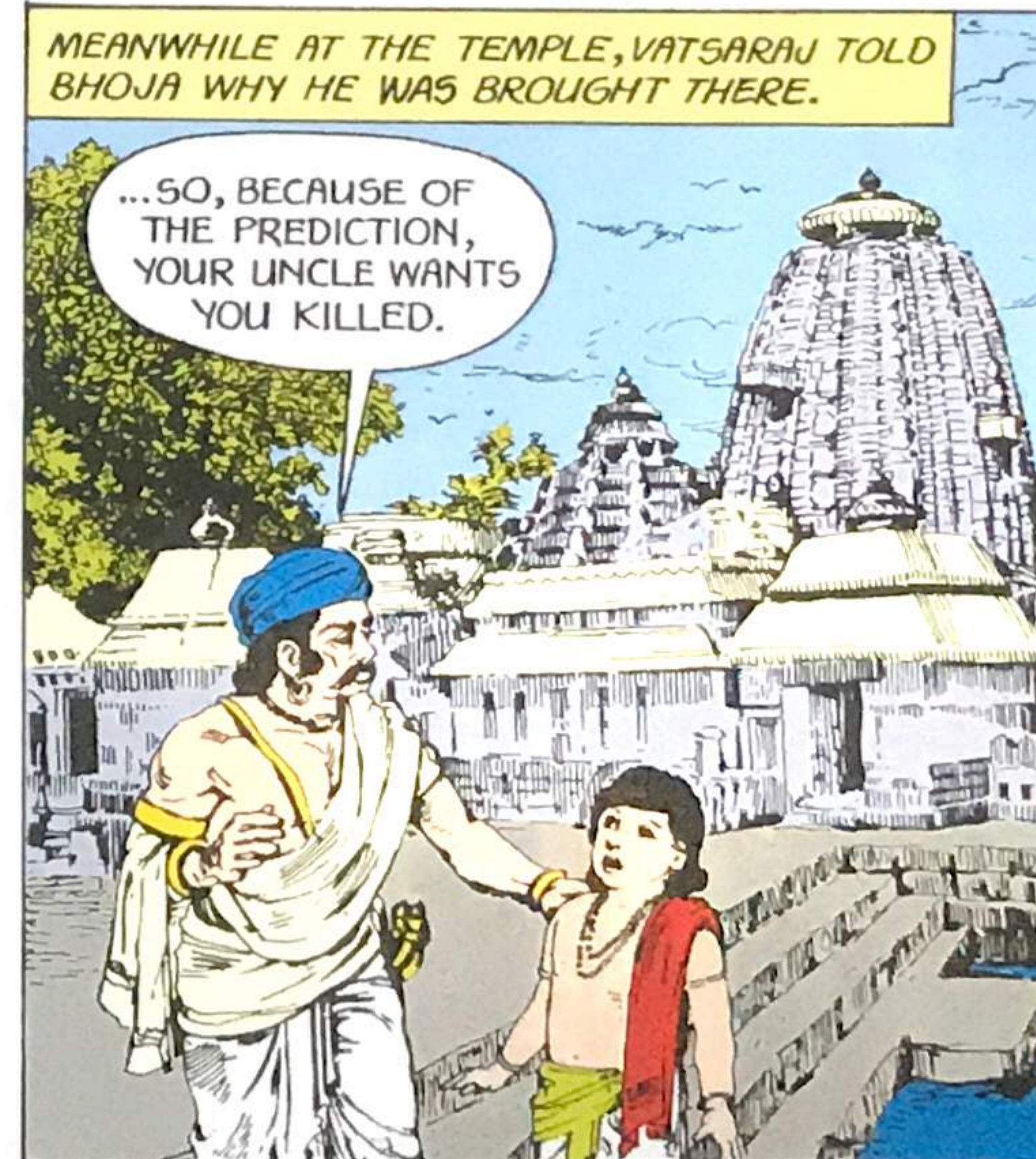
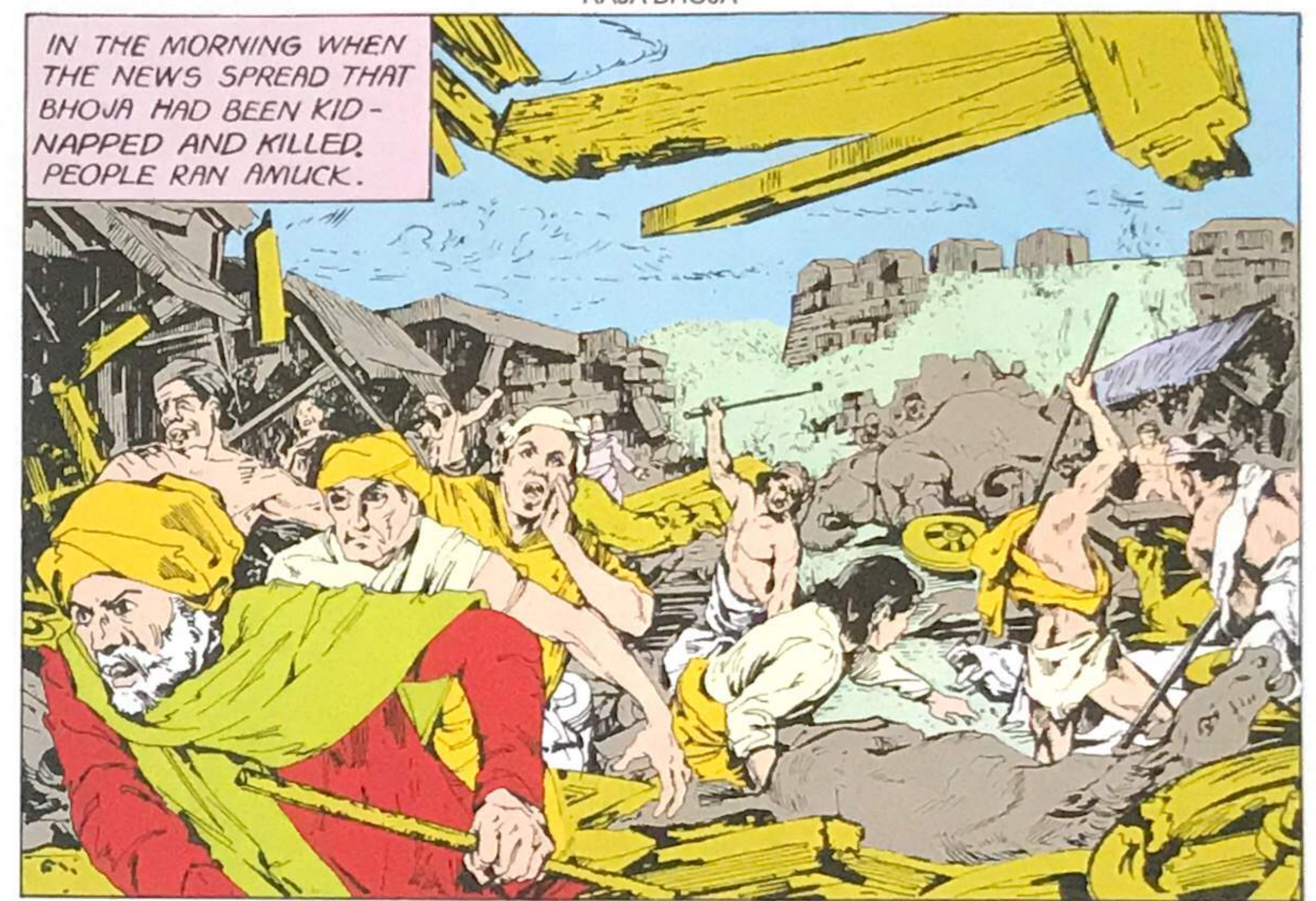
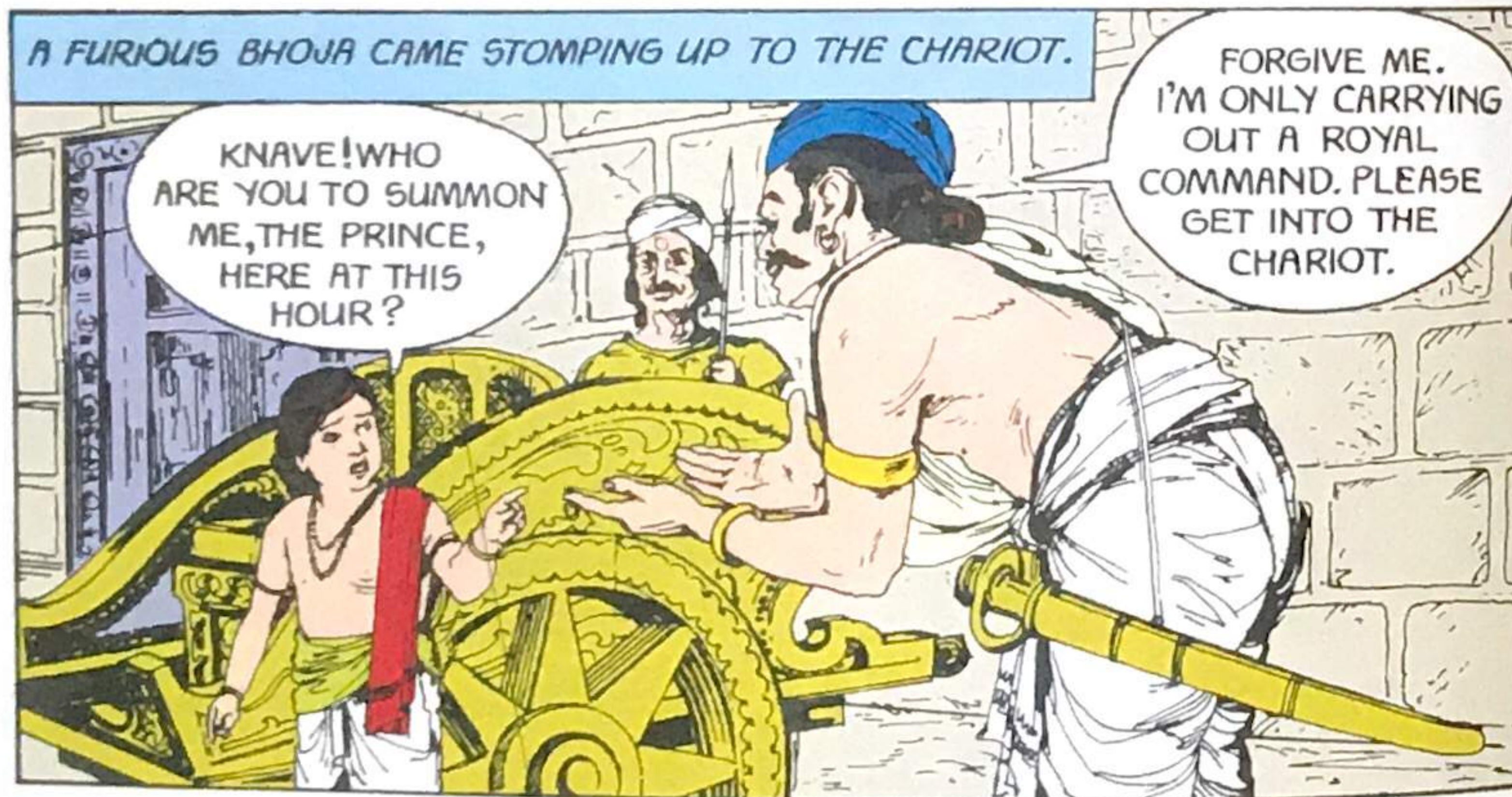
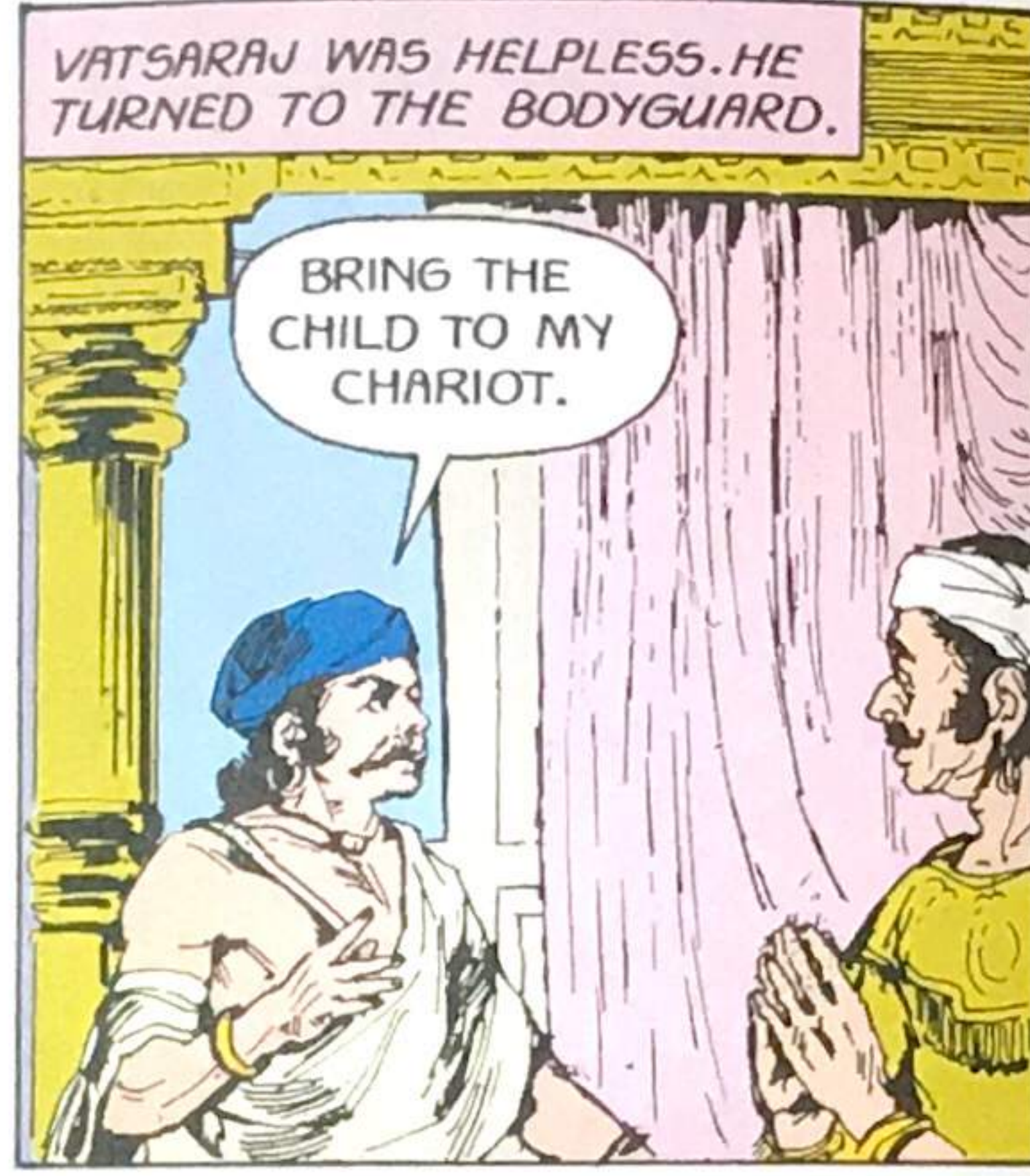
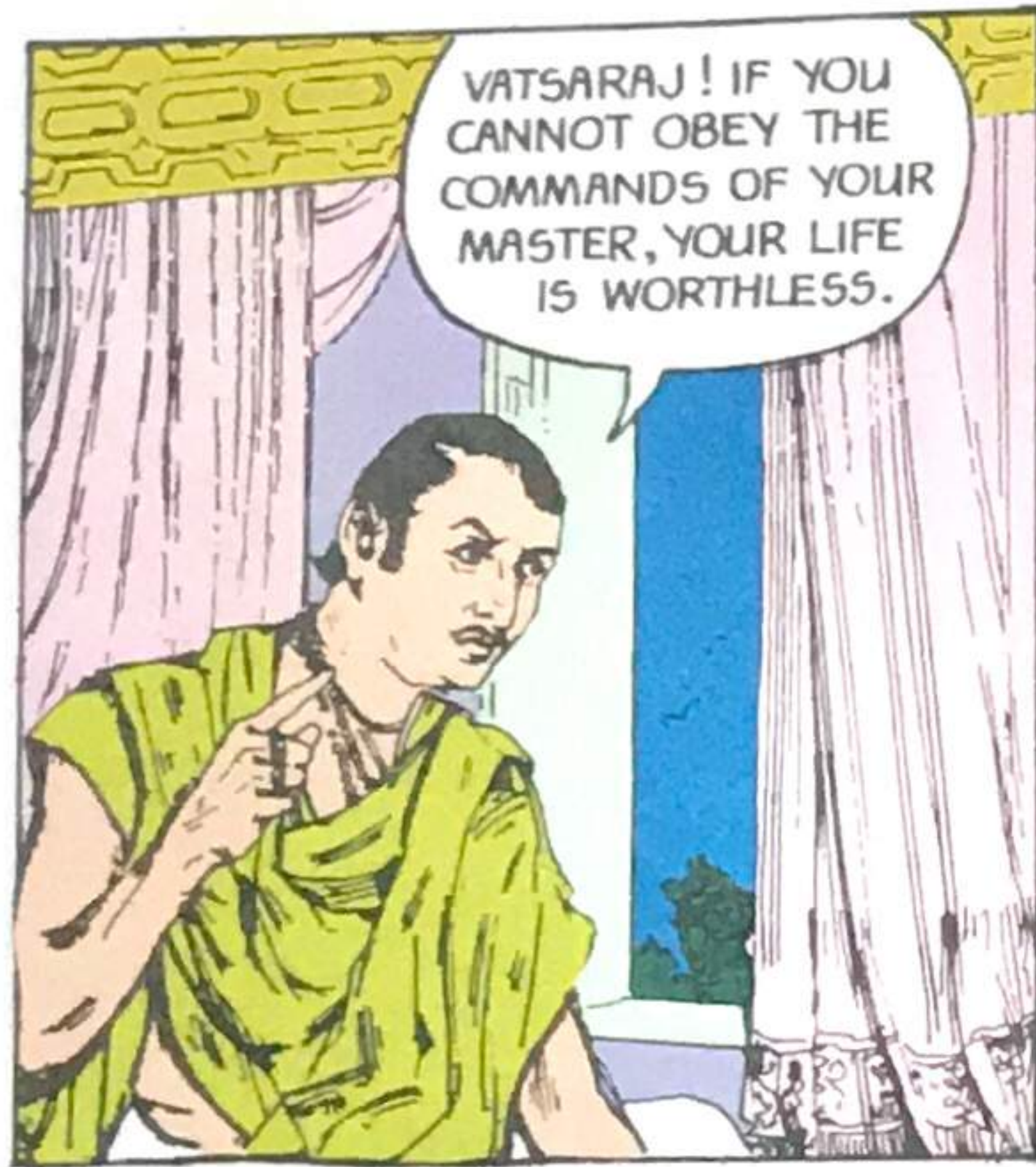
SIR, I CAN TELL ALL THAT HAPPENED IN THE PAST AND ALL THAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE FUTURE. YOU MAY QUESTION ME.

MUNJA WAS AMAZED AT THE BRAHMAN'S CONCEIT.



THEN TELL ME EVERY SINGLE THING I DID FROM THE DAY I WAS BORN TILL THIS MOMENT.





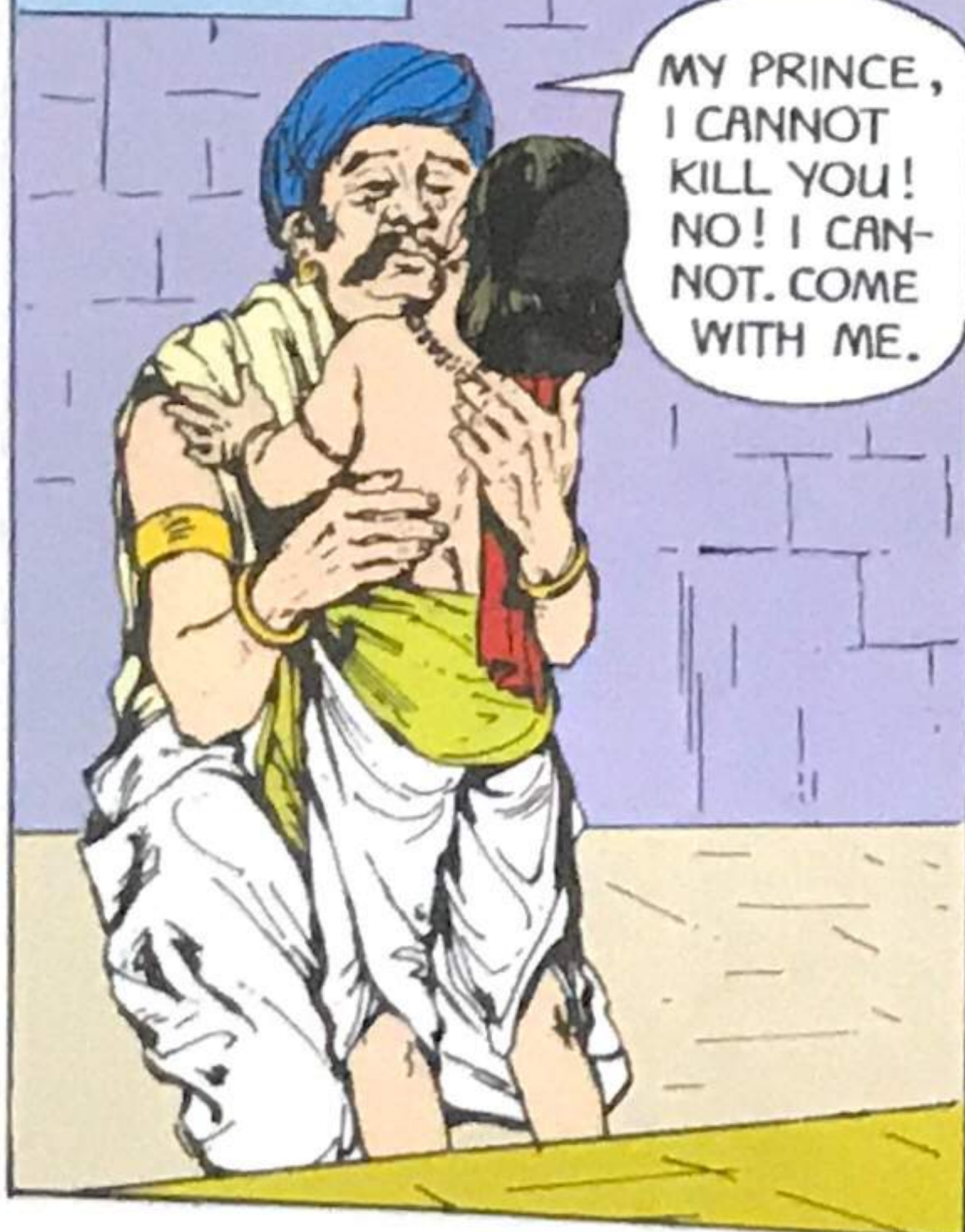
HE THEN SCRIBBLED A MESSAGE ON A FIG-LEAF.



GIVE THIS TO THE KING. I AM READY CARRY OUT THE ROYAL COMMAND.

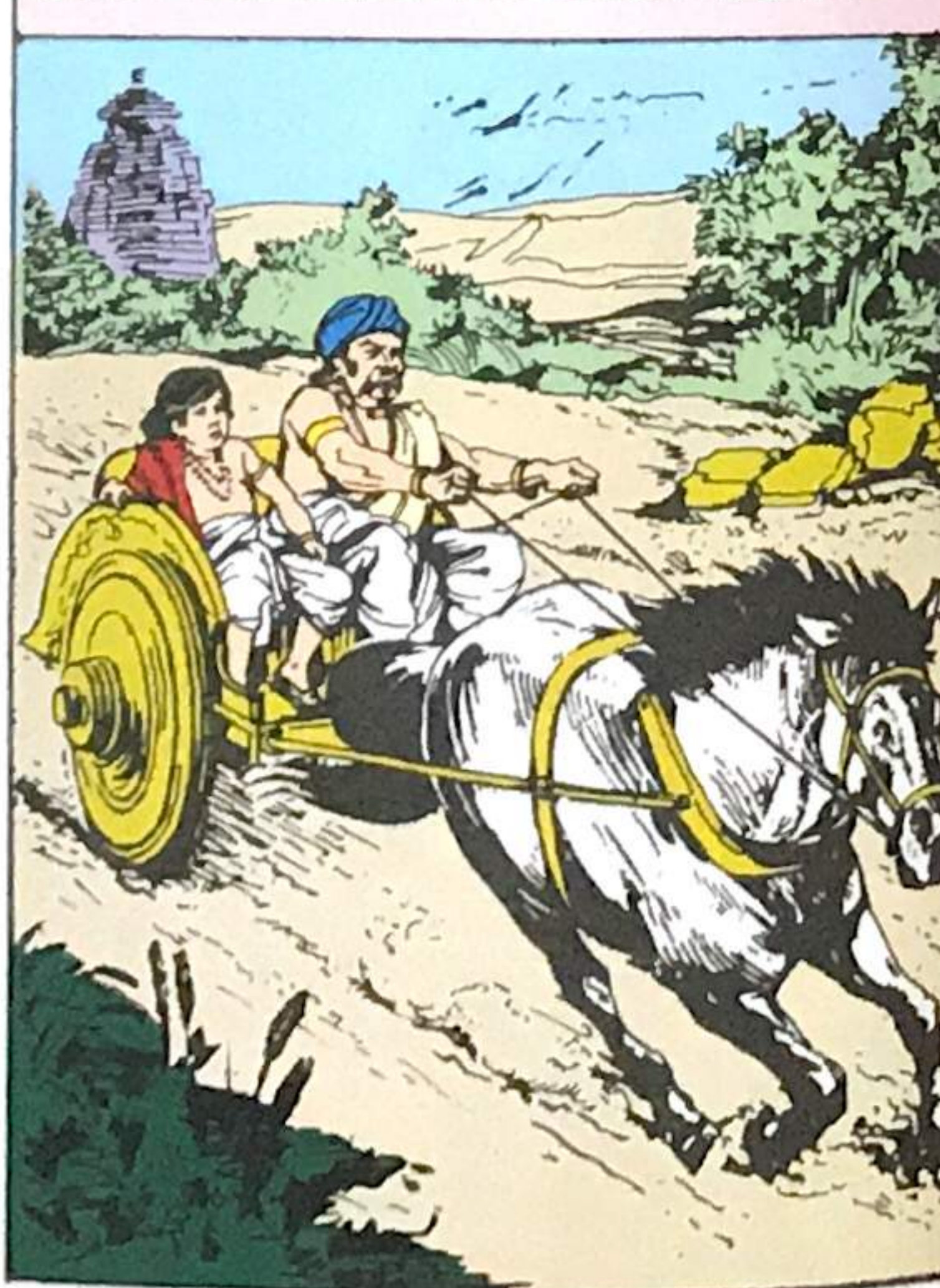


LOOKING AT THE BOY, VATSARAJ WAS FILLED WITH A SUDDEN REVULSION FOR HIS TASK.



MY PRINCE, I CANNOT KILL YOU! NO! I CANNOT. COME WITH ME.

THEY MOUNTED THE CHARIOT AND RODE OUT INTO THE DARK NIGHT.



VATSARAJ TOOK BHOJA TO A SECRET HIDEOUT, OUTSIDE THE CITY.



YOU WILL STAY HERE UNTIL IT IS SAFE FOR YOU TO ENTER DHARA.

VATSARAJ THEN HAD A FAKE HEAD OF BHOJA MADE...



...AND TOOK IT TO MUNJA.



HERE IS THE HEAD BHOJA'S BODY HAS BEEN SENT TO THE CEMETERY.

WHAT WERE HIS LAST WORDS?

HE DID NOT SAY ANYTHING, BUT ASKED ME TO GIVE YOU THIS LEAF.



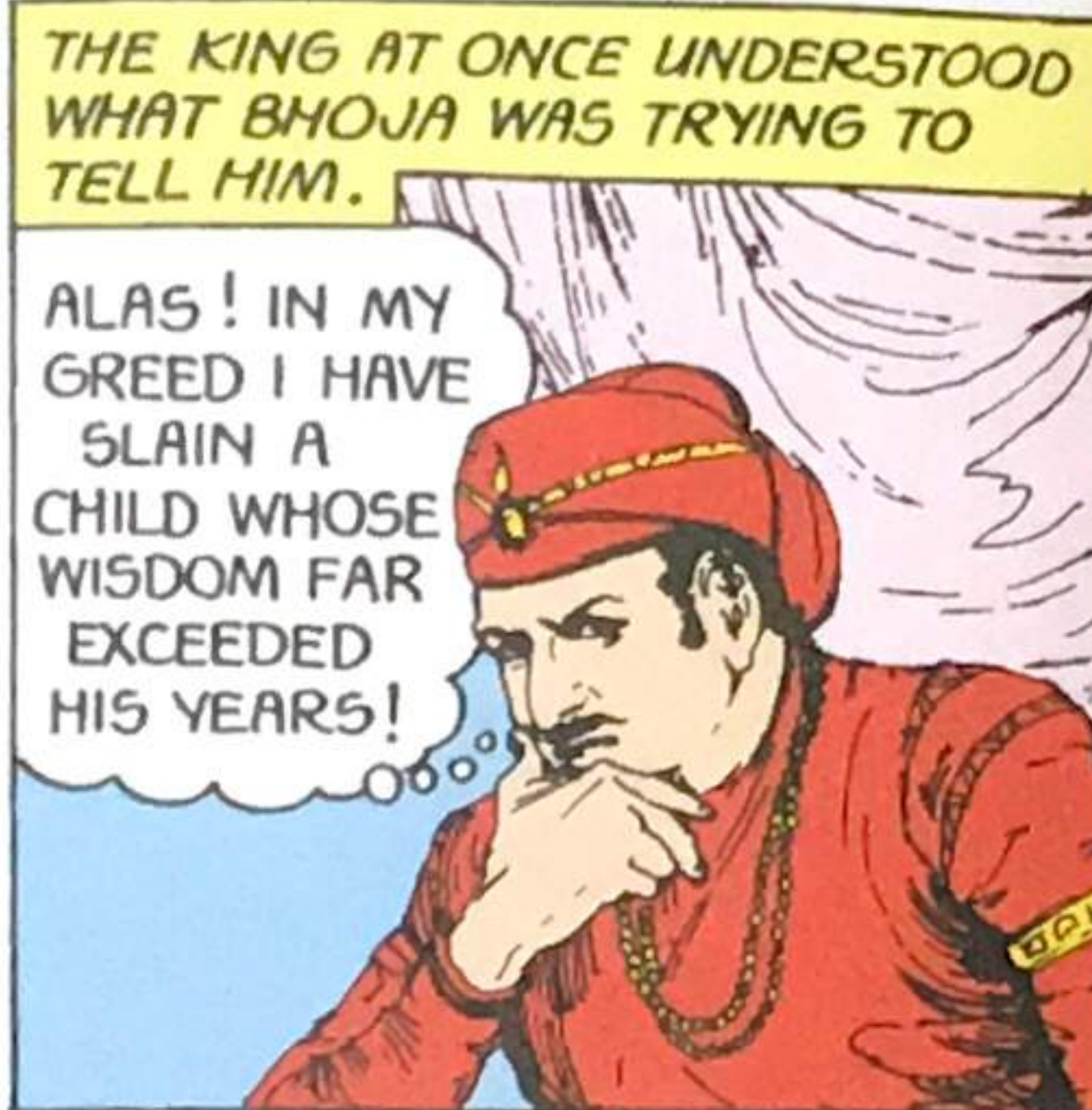
THE KING STUDIED THE LEAF.

THERE SEEMS TO BE A MESSAGE SCRIBBLED ON IT.





GREAT KINGS LIKE RAMA AND YUDHISHTHIRA HAVE GONE TO HEAVEN. BUT BHOOMIDEVI* DID NOT GO WITH A SINGLE ONE OF THEM. WILL SHE GO WITH YOU, O MUNJA?

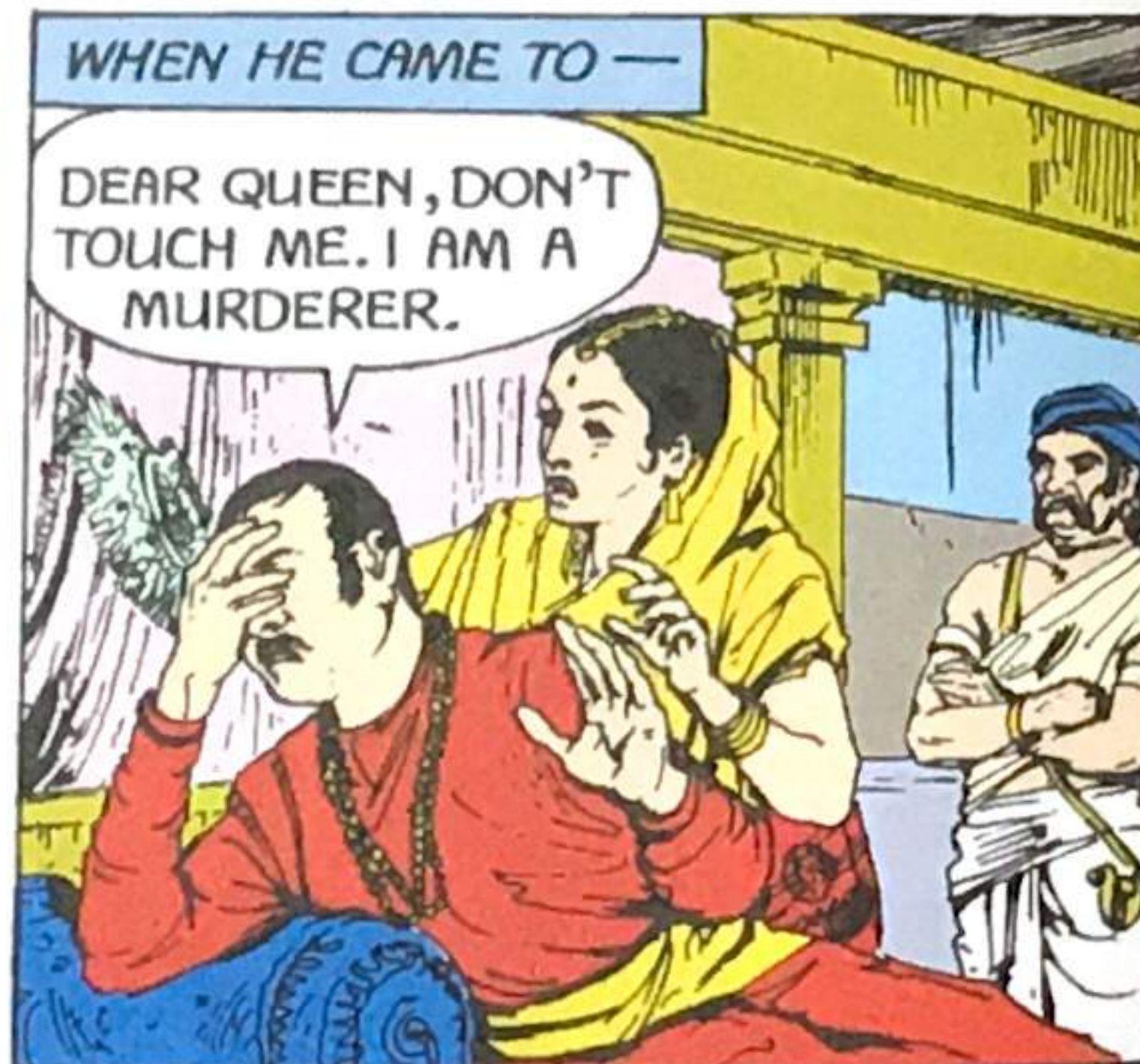


THE KING AT ONCE UNDERSTOOD WHAT BHOJA WAS TRYING TO TELL HIM.

ALAS! IN MY GREED I HAVE SLAIN A CHILD WHOSE WISDOM FAR EXCEEDED HIS YEARS!

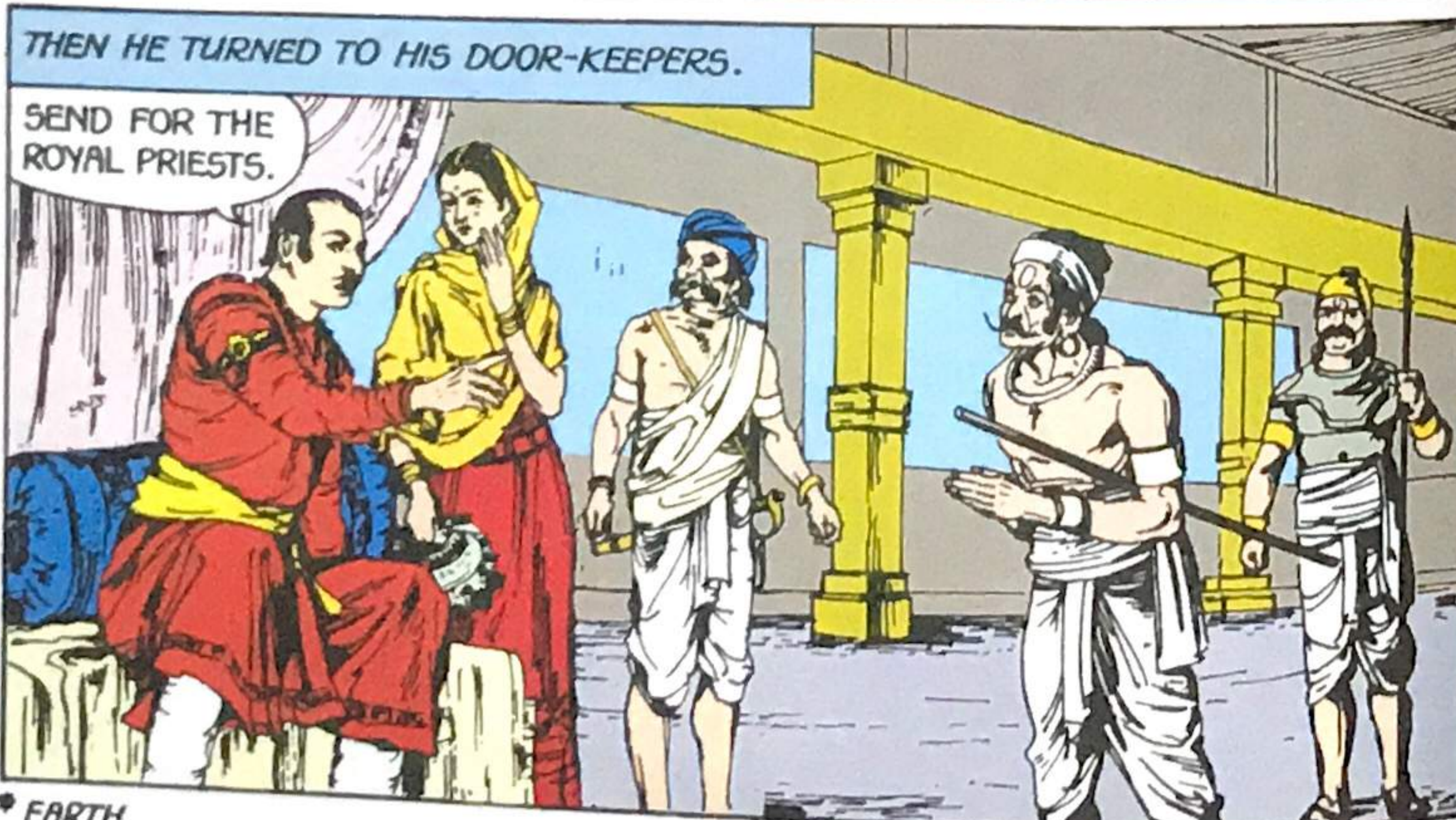


SO FULL OF REMORSE WAS HE THAT HE FAINTED.



WHEN HE CAME TO —

DEAR QUEEN, DON'T TOUCH ME. I AM A MURDERER.



THEN HE TURNED TO HIS DOOR-KEEPERS.

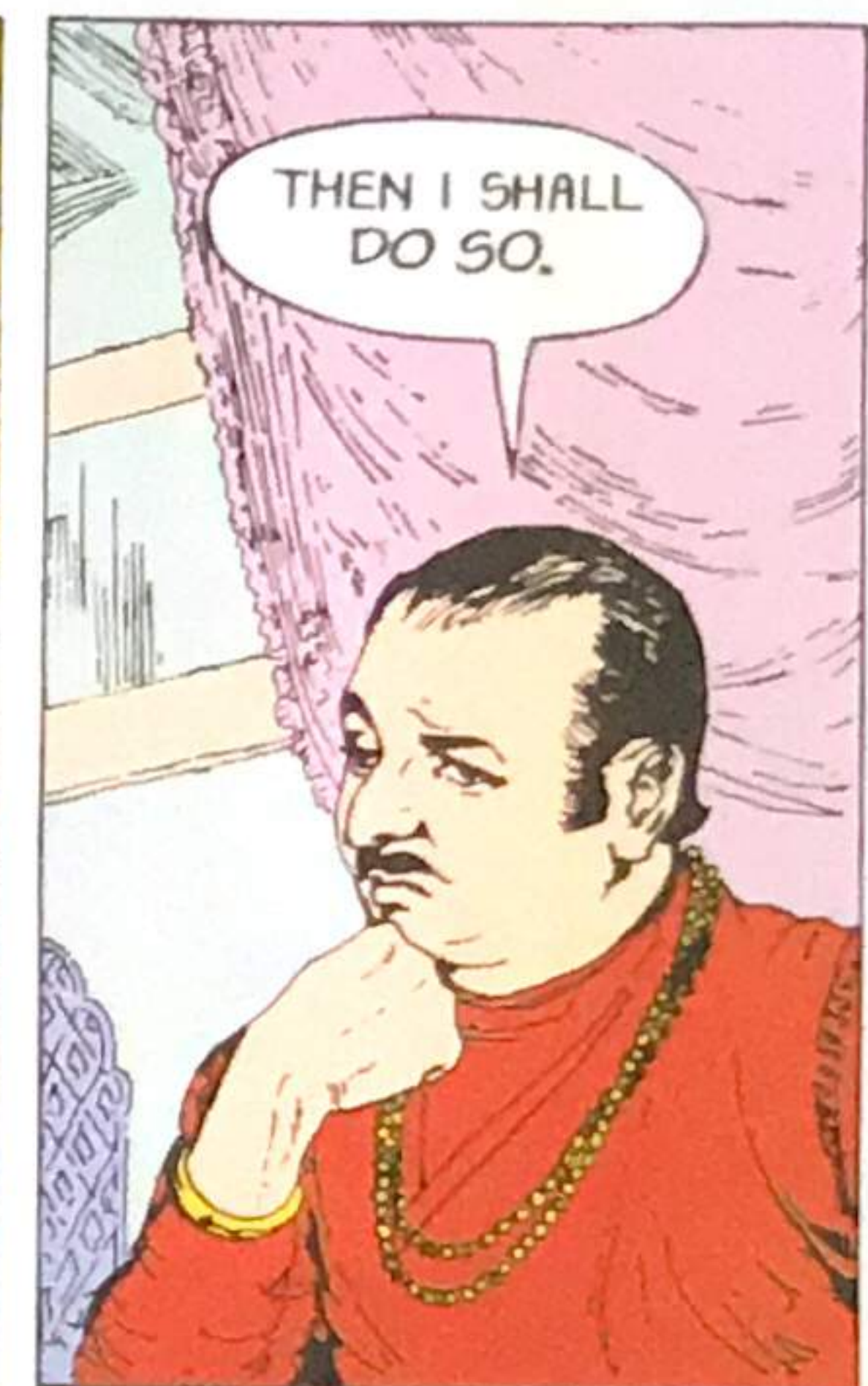
SEND FOR THE ROYAL PRIESTS.



THE PRIESTS CAME ACCOMPANIED BY BUDDHISAGARA.

I HAVE MURDERED THE PRINCE. HOW CAN I EXPIATE THE SIN?

YOU WILL HAVE TO DIE BY ENTERING THE FIRE!



THEN I SHALL DO SO.



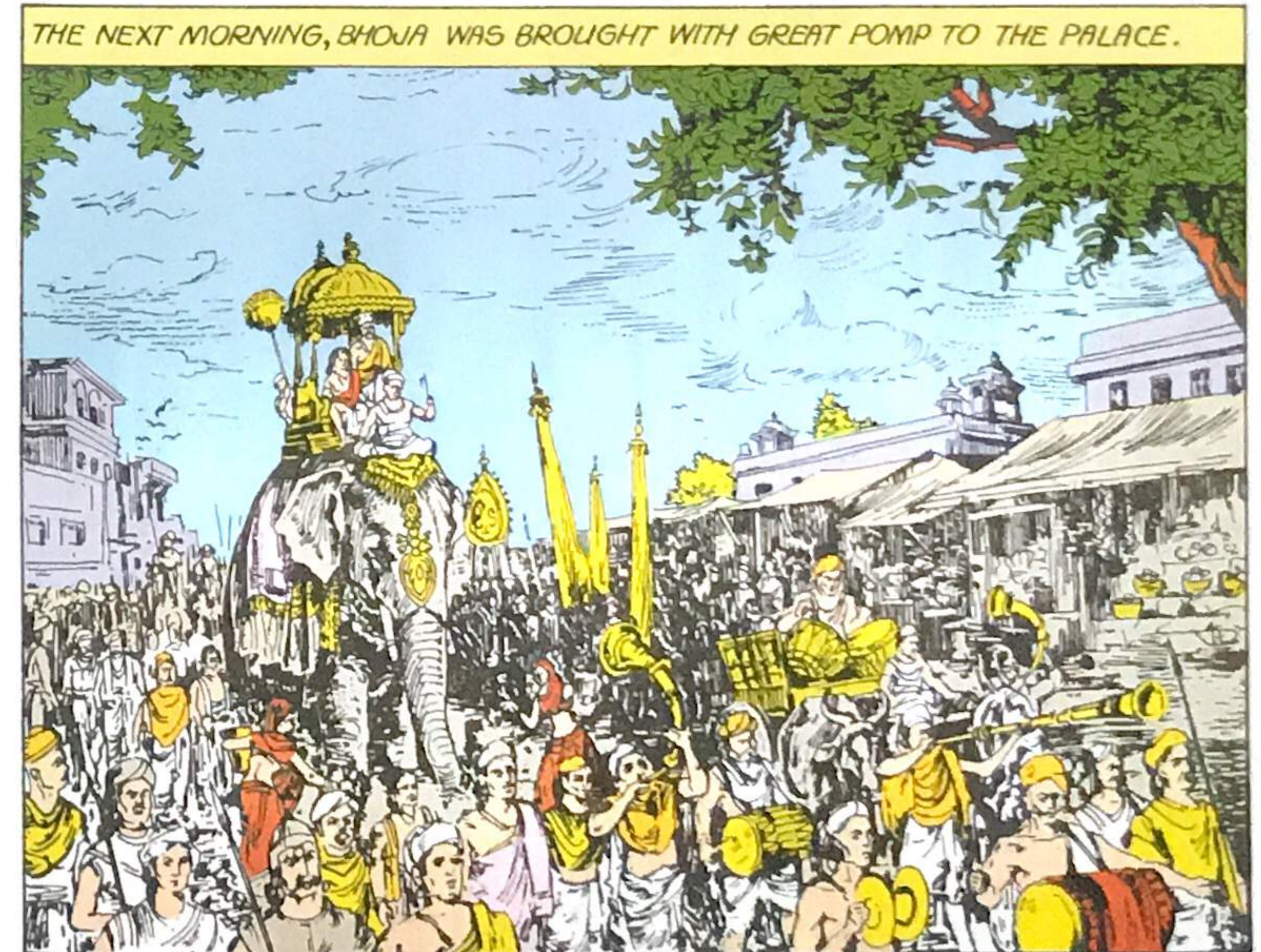
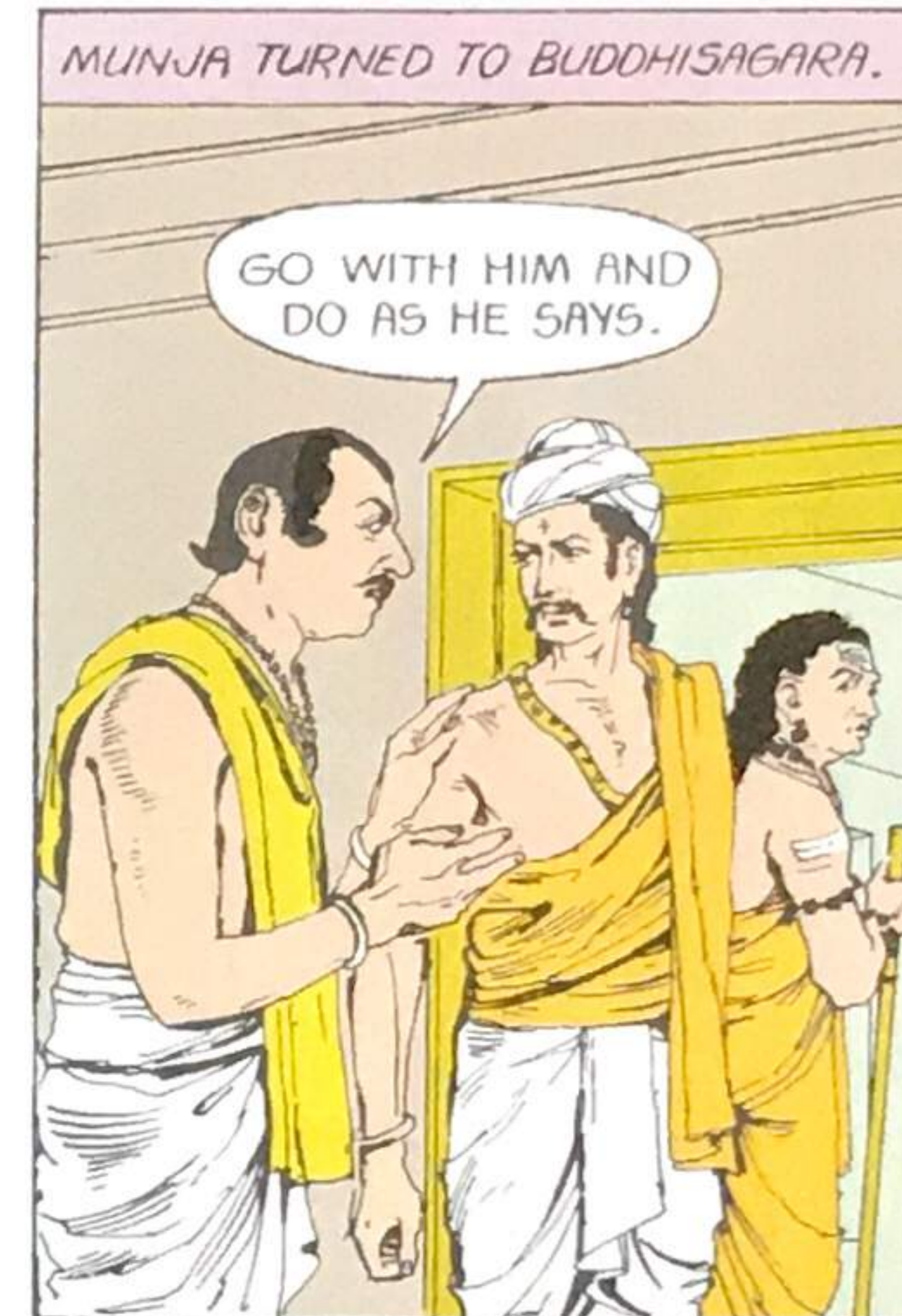
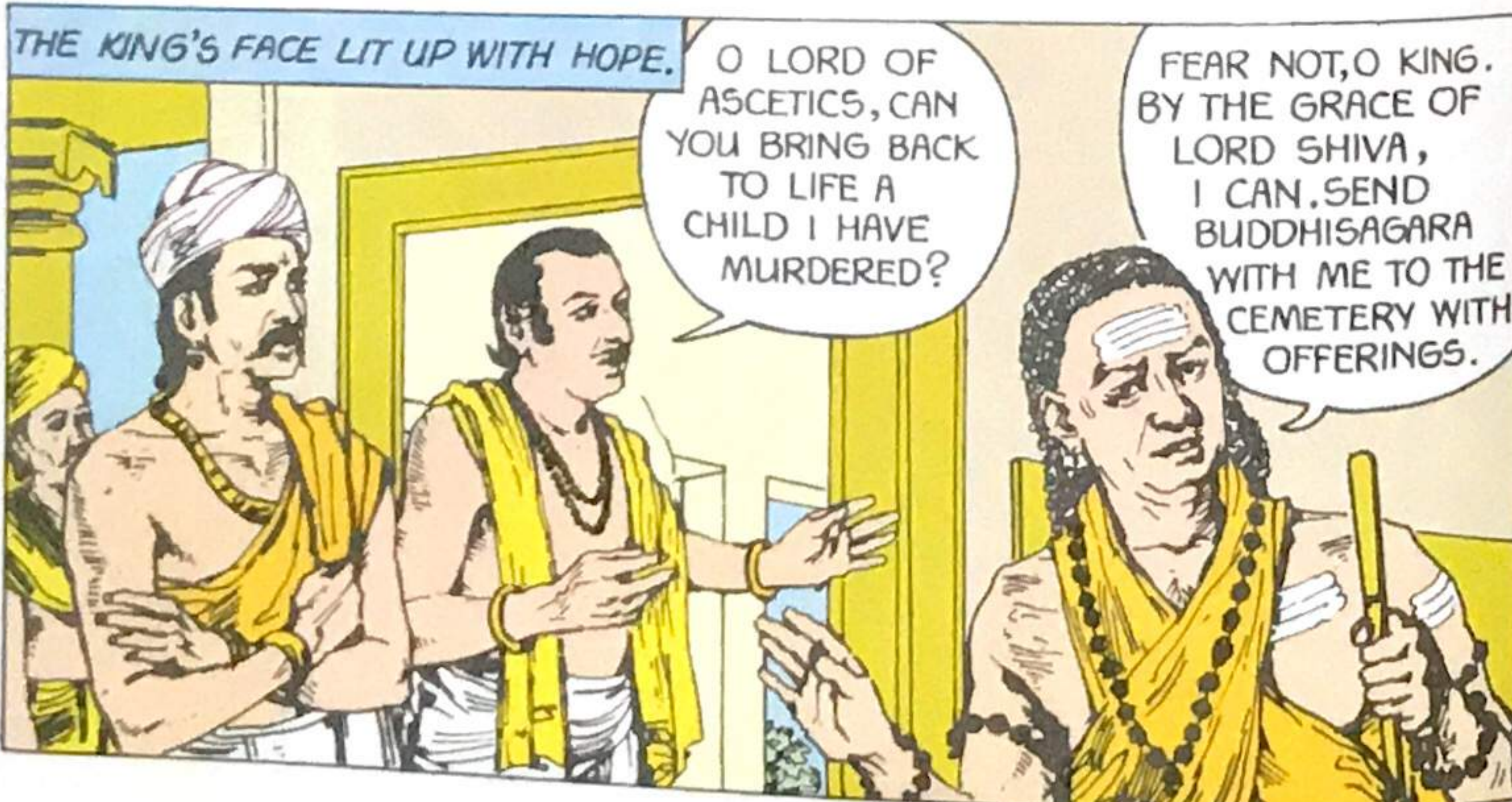
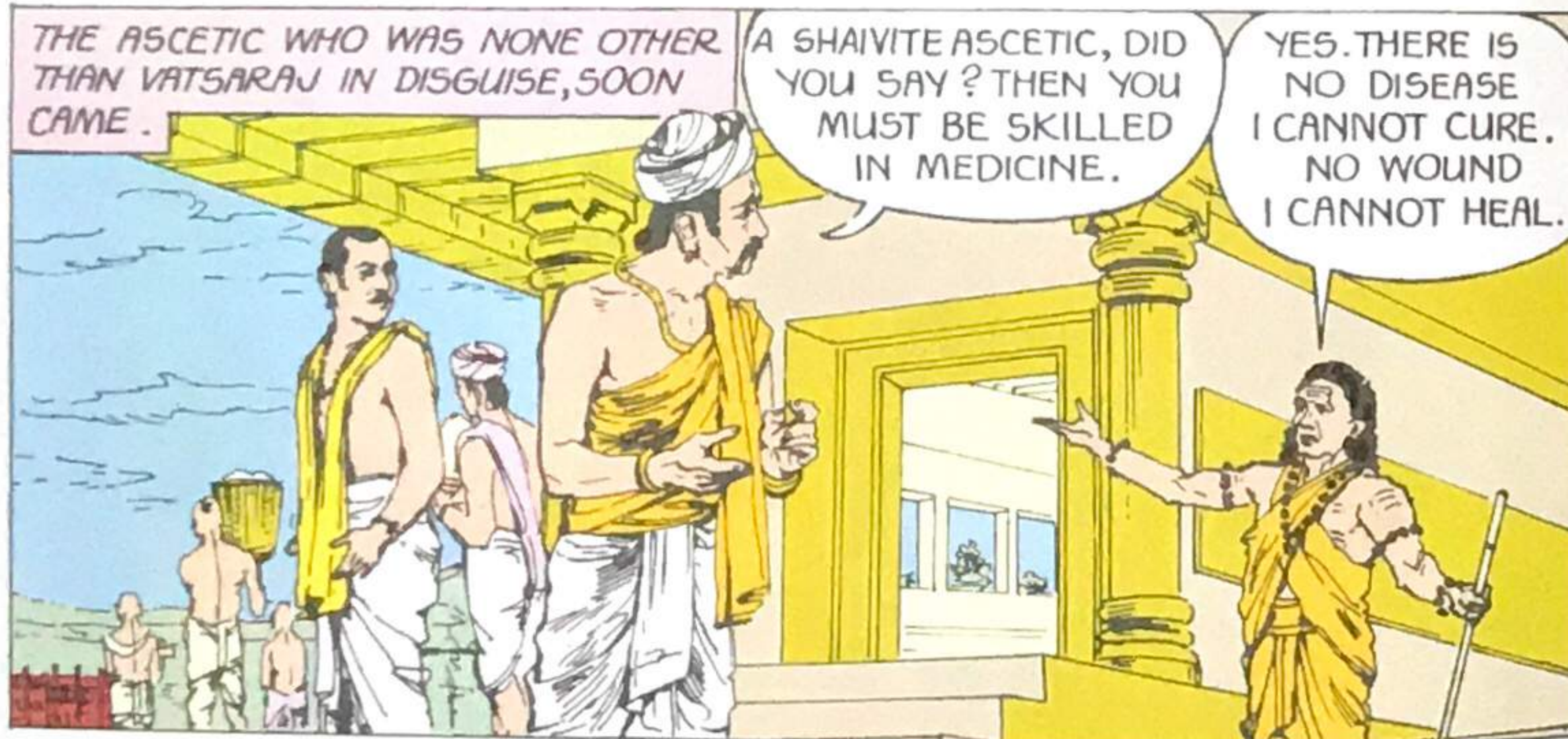
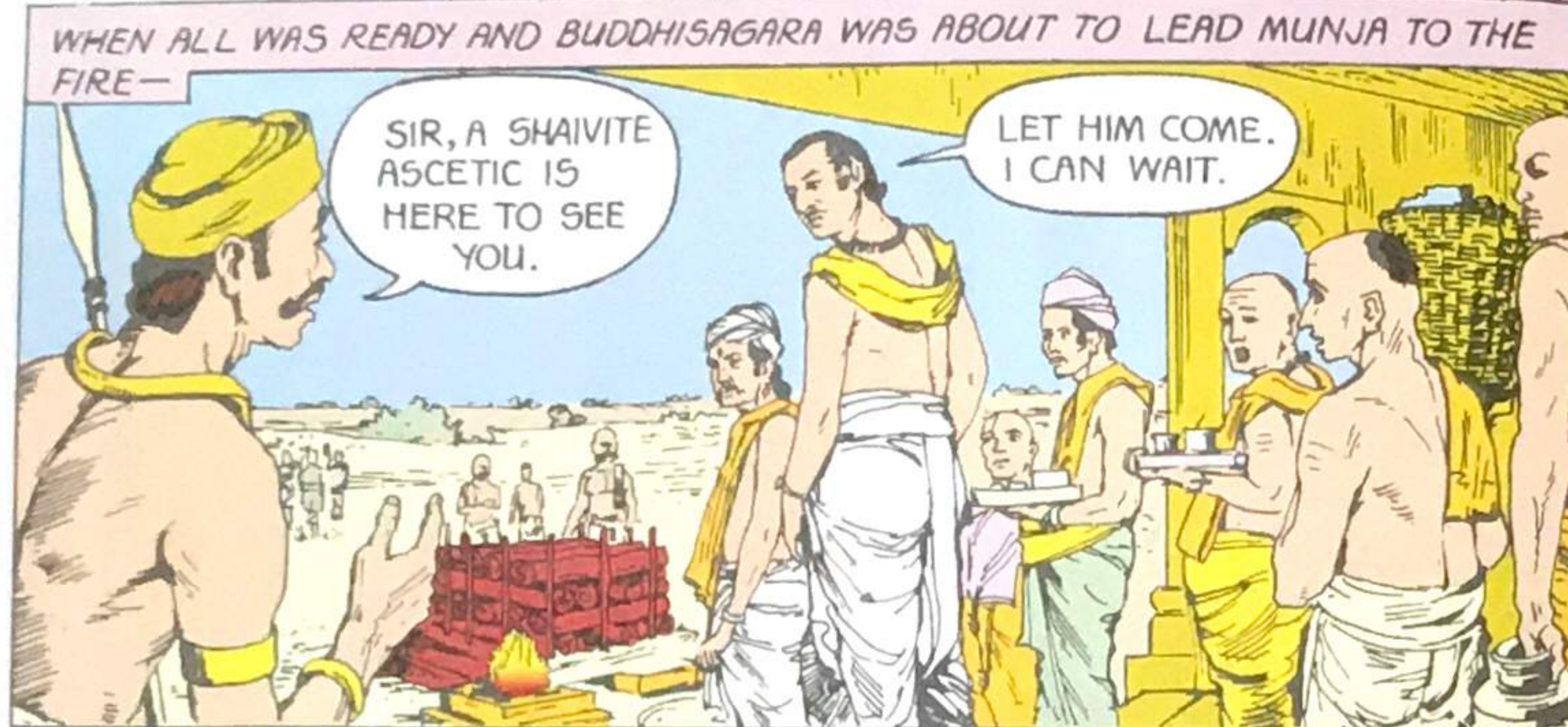
AT THAT MOMENT, VATSARAJ TOOK BUDDHISAGARA ASIDE.

SIR, BHOJA IS NOT DEAD. I HAVE LEFT HIM SAFE IN A SECRET HIDEOUT.

IS THAT SO? THEN DO AS I TELL YOU.



AND BUDDHISAGARA WHISPERED SOMETHING INTO VATSARAJ'S EARS.

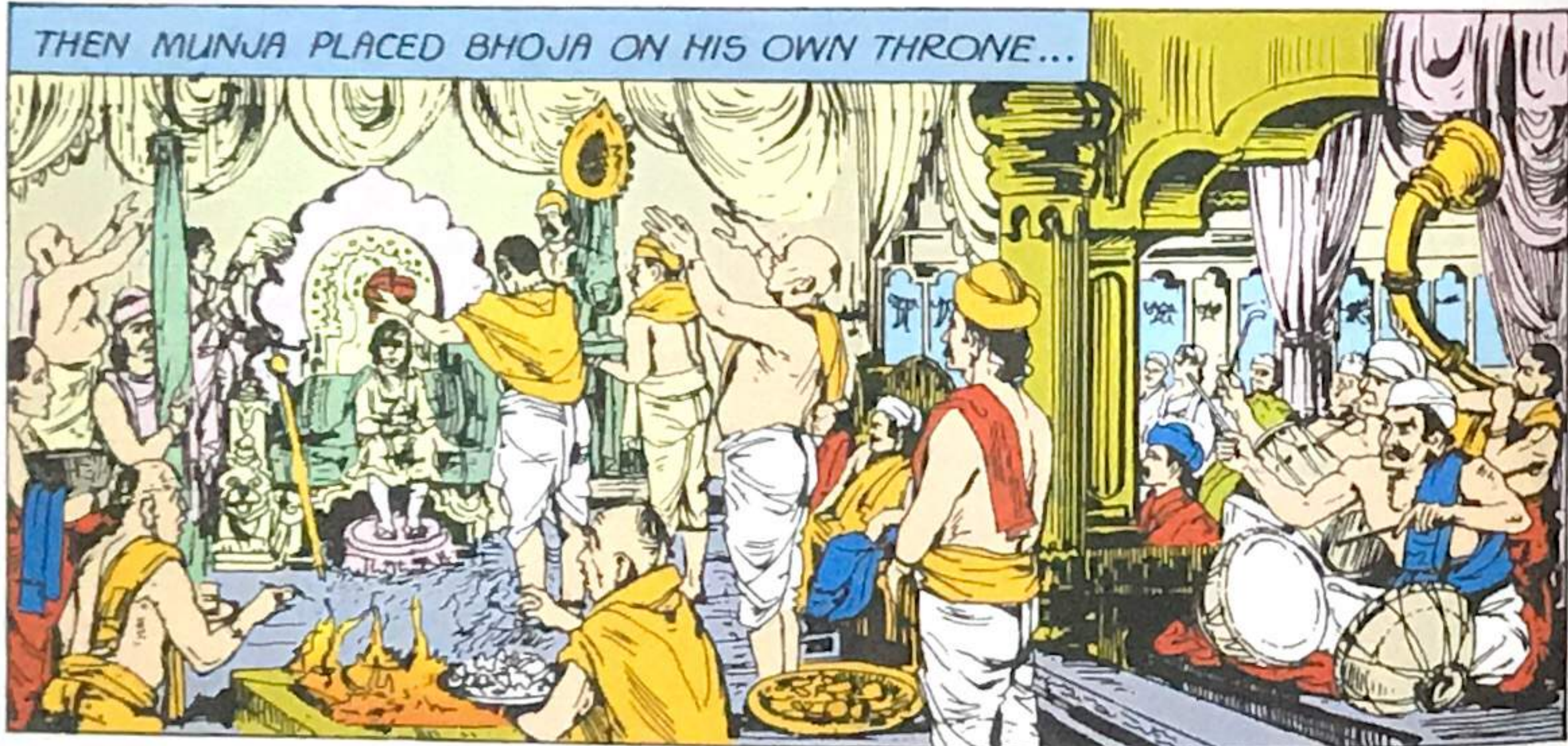


AS SOON AS HE REACHED THE PALACE, MUNJA EMBRACED HIM AND WEPT.

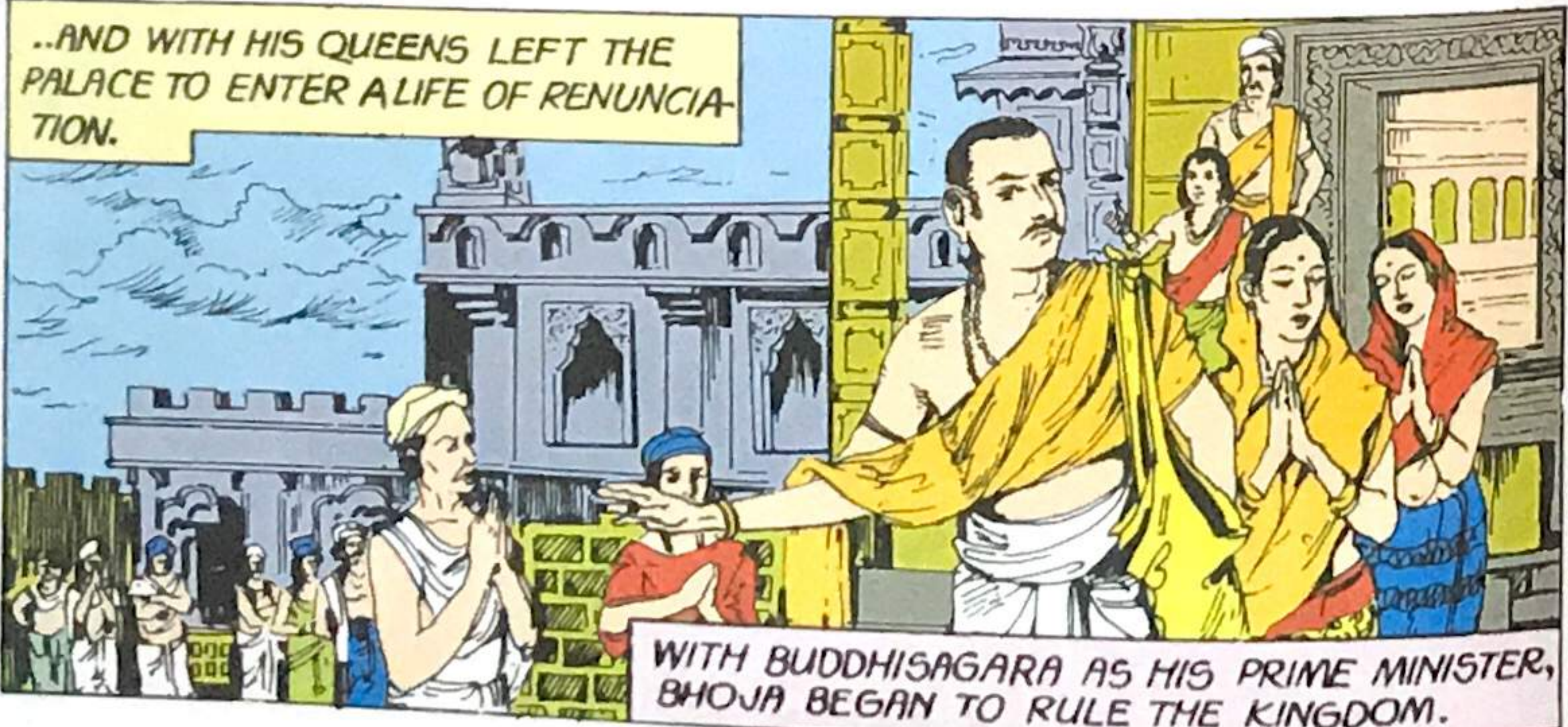


DO NOT CRY, DEAR UNCLE. YOU HAVE ACTED MAGNANIMOUSLY.

THEN MUNJA PLACED BHOJA ON HIS OWN THRONE...



..AND WITH HIS QUEENS LEFT THE PALACE TO ENTER A LIFE OF RENUNCIATION.



WITH BUDDHISAGARA AS HIS PRIME MINISTER, BHOJA BEGAN TO RULE THE KINGDOM.

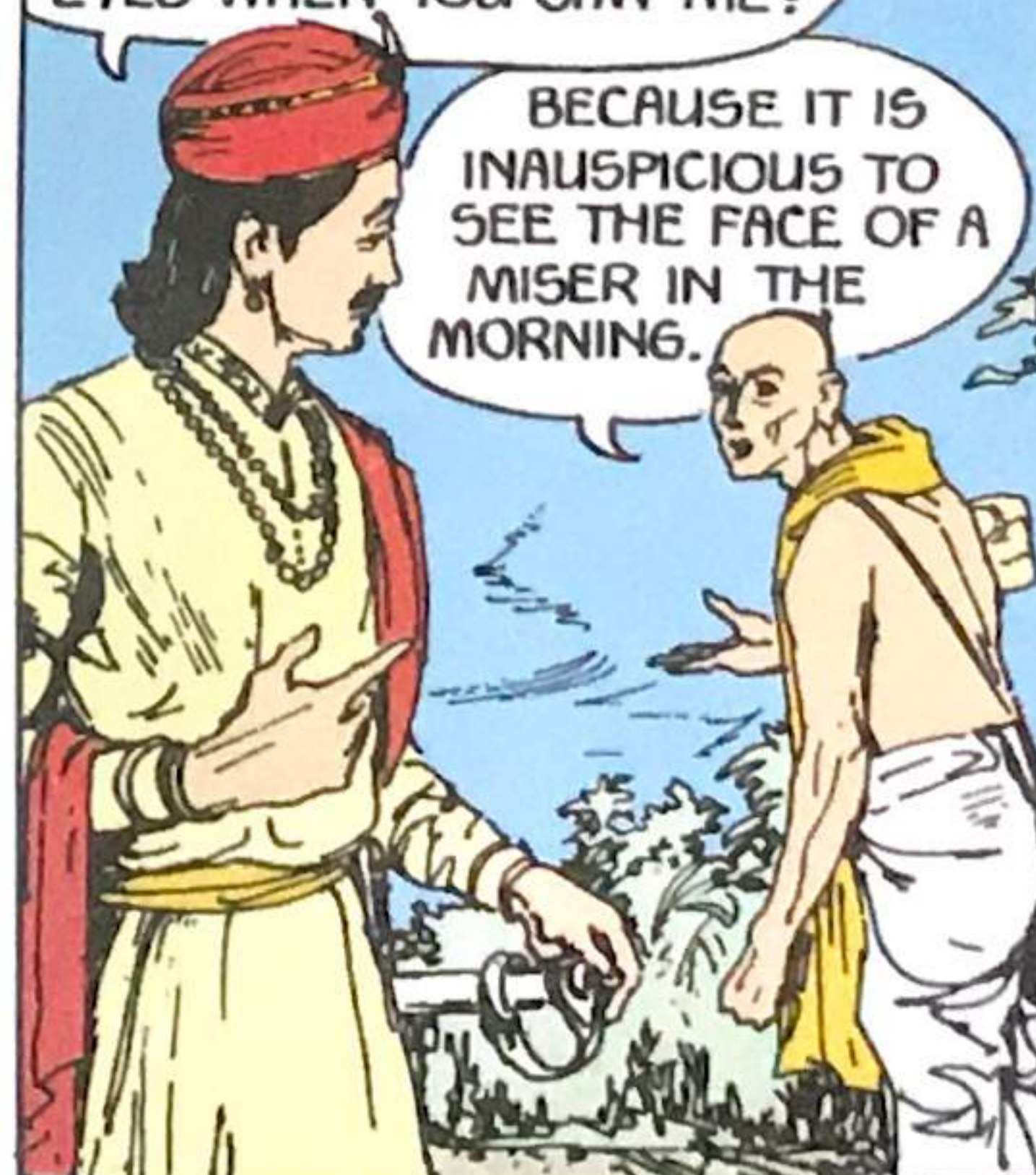
RAJA BHOJA SOON GREW UP INTO A STRONG YOUNG MAN. ONE DAY—



HE IGNORES ME AS IF I WERE A COMMONER.

HE DECIDED TO QUESTION THE BRAHMAN.

WHY DID YOU DELIBERATELY CLOSE YOUR EYES WHEN YOU SAW ME?



BECAUSE IT IS INAUSPICIOUS TO SEE THE FACE OF A MISER IN THE MORNING.

RAJA BHOJA WAS TAKEN ABACK, BUT HE ALLOWED THE BRAHMAN TO CONTINUE.

THE HUMAN BODY BEING MORTAL, IT IS ONLY THE GLORY OF KINGS THAT LIVES AFTER THEM. GENEROSITY IS THE GREATEST QUALITY OF A GLORIOUS KING. SINCE YOU ARE NOT GENEROUS I SEE NO POINT IN ACKNOWLEDGING YOUR ROYALTY.



THE KING WAS IMPRESSED.

THE WORLD IS FULL OF FLATTERERS. A FEARLESS, HONEST MAN IS HARD TO FIND. I MUST HAVE MEN LIKE HIM ABOUT ME IN MY COURT.

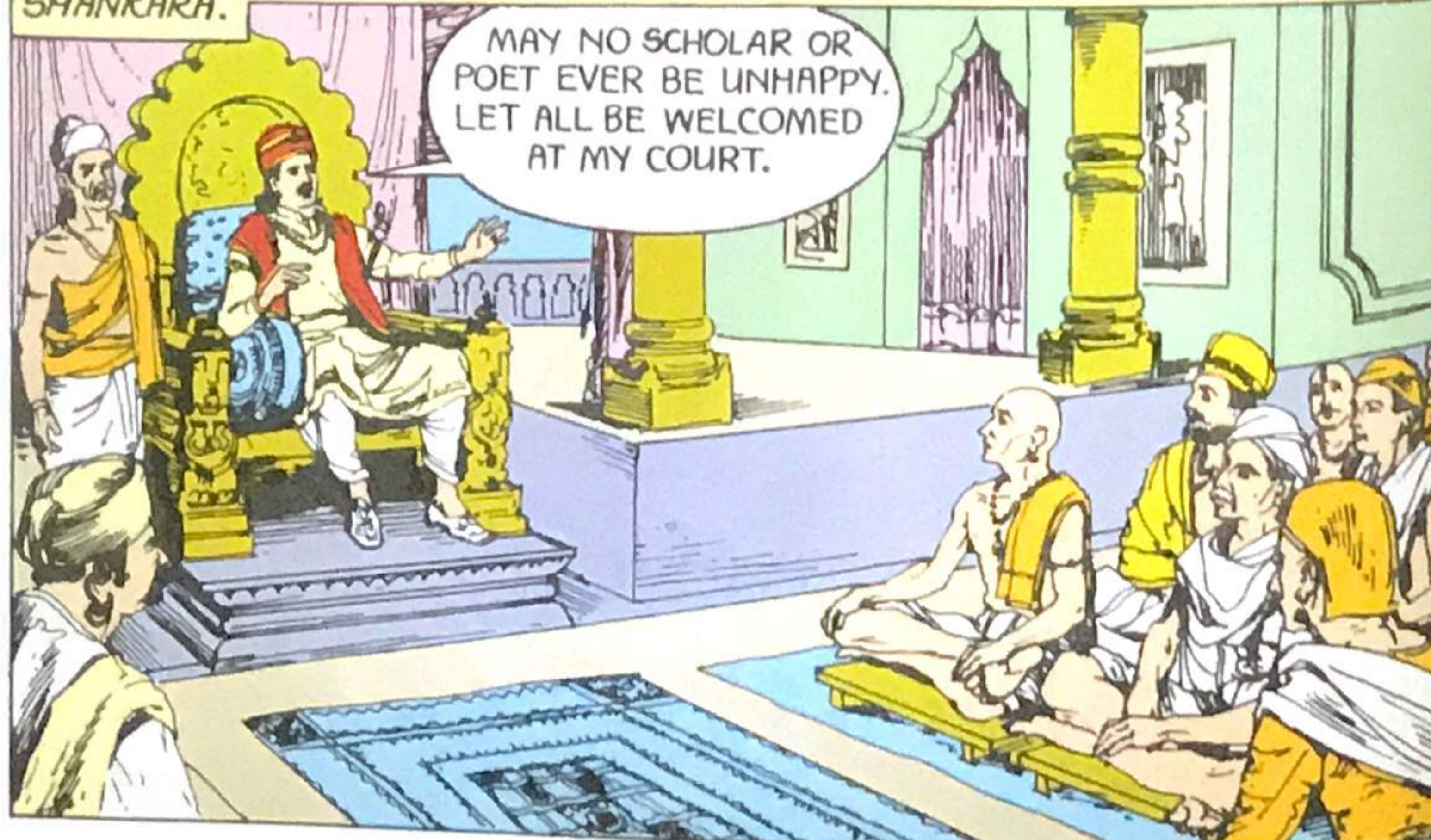


O BRAHMAN, YOU SHALL BE REWARDED FOR OPENING MY EYES. AND YOU MUST COME TO MY COURT EVERY DAY.



AND FROM THAT DAY, RAJA BHOJA WAS LAVISH IN HIS GIFTS, PARTICULARLY TO THE LEARNED.

WORD SOON SPREAD ABOUT RAJA BHOJA'S UNEQUALLED GENEROSITY AND MAGNANIMITY. POETS, SCHOLARS AND SAVANTS FLOCKED TO HIS COURT. AMONG THEM WERE SUCH RENOWNED PERSONS AS VARARUCHI, BANA, MAYURA AND SHANKARA.



MAY NO SCHOLAR OR POET EVER BE UNHAPPY. LET ALL BE WELCOMED AT MY COURT.

ONE DAY AT DUSK, A NEW POET ARRIVED AT THE COURT. HIS NAME WAS KALIDASA.

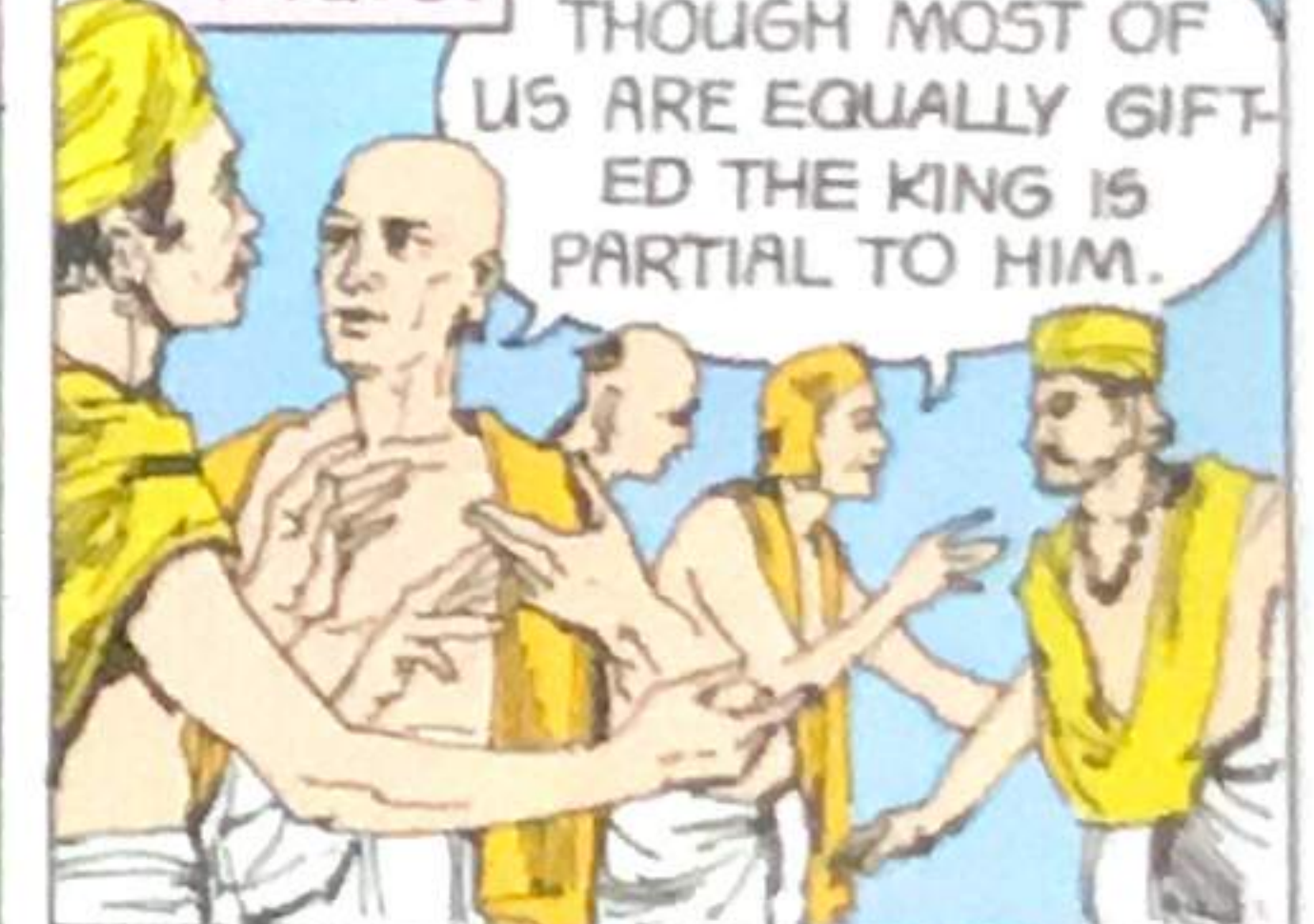


FRIEND, DESCRIBE THE TWILIGHT.

SO BEAUTIFUL WAS KALIDASA'S DESCRIPTION THAT RAJA BHOJA TOOK AN IMMEDIATE LIKING TO HIM AND A DEEP FRIENDSHIP WAS BORN BETWEEN THEM.



THIS UNFORTUNATELY AROUSED THE JEALOUSY OF THE OTHER POETS.



THOUGH MOST OF US ARE EQUALLY GIFTED THE KING IS PARTIAL TO HIM.

THEY DELIBERATELY SPREAD RUMOURS ABOUT KALIDASA'S CHARACTER AND POISONED THE KING'S MIND.



WHERE IS KALIDASA? I DO NOT SEE HIM AT COURT.

EVEN THE MOST LEARNED CANNOT ESCAPE THE LURE OF COURT DANCERS.

THE NEXT DAY RAJA BHOJA POINTEDLY IGNORED KALIDASA. THE POET SENSED THAT THE KING WAS DISPLEASED WITH HIM FOR SOME REASON.

A KING'S FAVOURITE HAS MANY ENEMIES. I SHALL LEAVE THE COURT AND STAY AT MY OWN HOUSE.



THAT NIGHT, HOWEVER, BHOJA FELT WRETCHED. HIS FAVOURITE QUEEN, LILAVATI NOTICED IT.

WHAT AILS MY LORD?

IT IS UNFORTUNATE THAT MY CLEVEREST POET SHOULD PREFER THE COMPANY OF COURT DANCERS TO THAT OF SCHOLARS.



YOU ARE ALL-KNOWING. BUT KALIDASA IS NO ORDINARY MAN. HE IS SARASWATI INCARNATE. HE SHOULD BE HONOURED AS SUCH.

YOU ARE RIGHT, MY DEAR. I SHALL MAKE AMENDS TOMORROW.

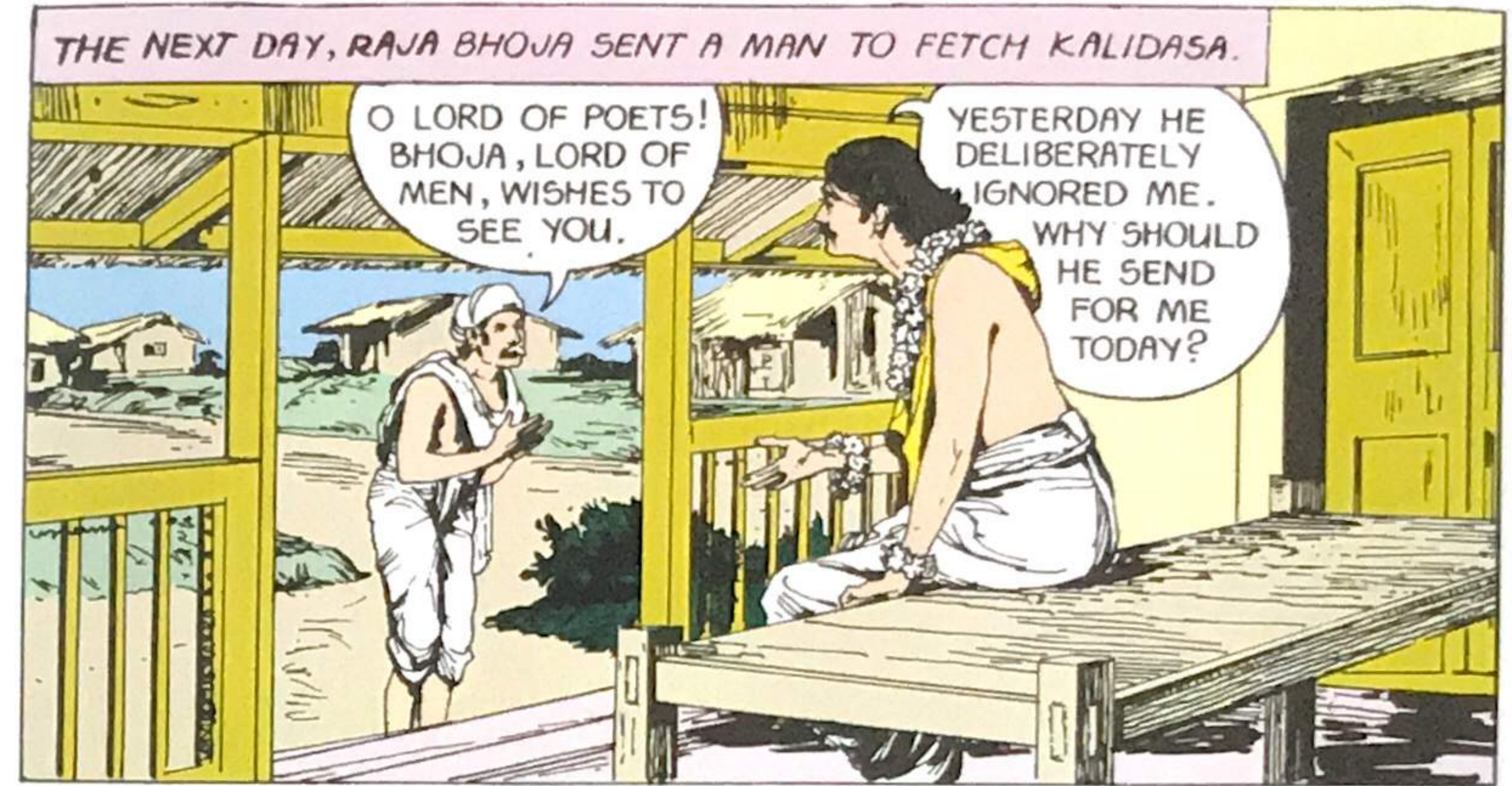


*THE GODDESS OF LEARNING.

THE NEXT DAY, RAJA BHOJA SENT A MAN TO FETCH KALIDASA.

O LORD OF POETS! BHOJA, LORD OF MEN, WISHES TO SEE YOU.

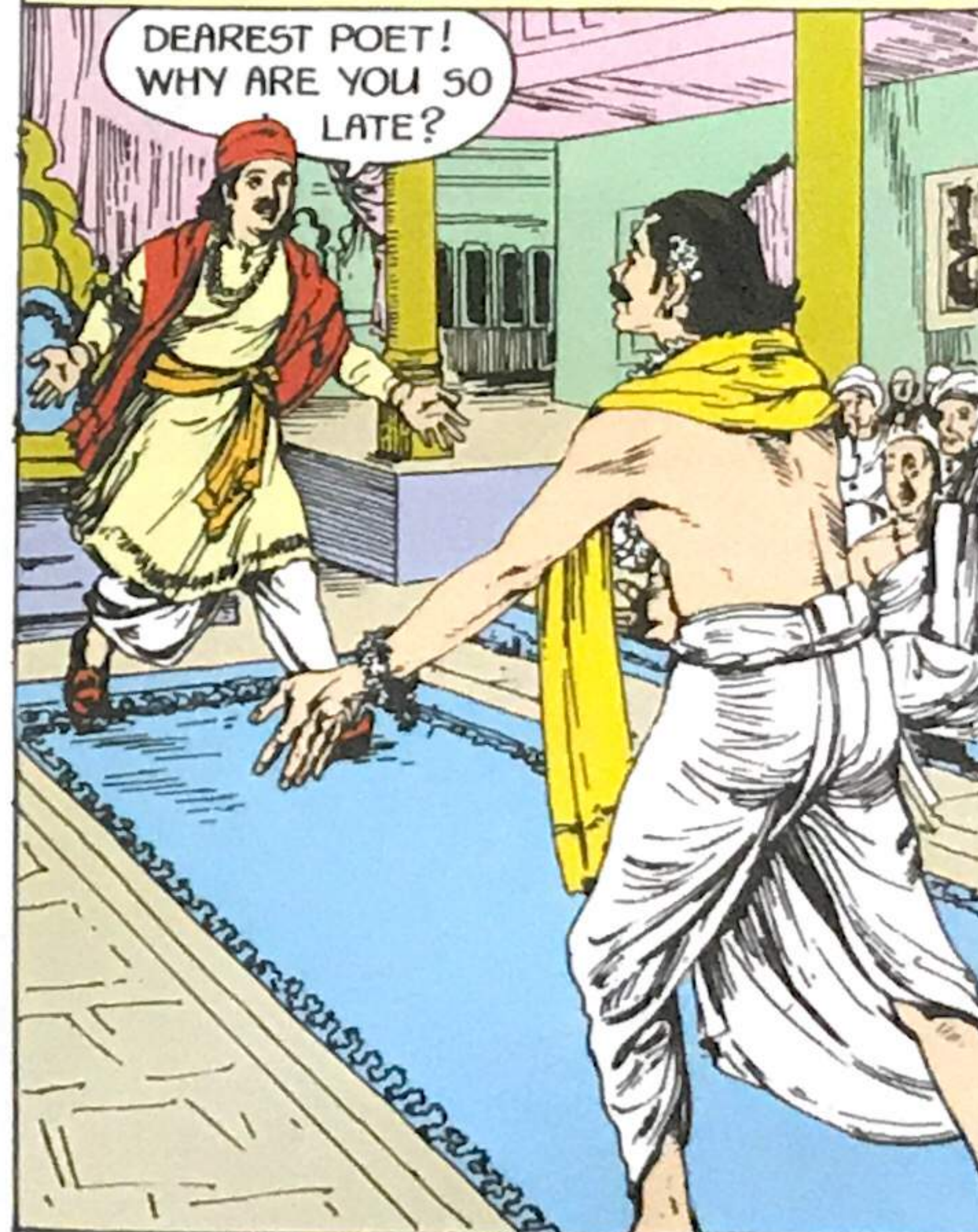
YESTERDAY HE DELIBERATELY IGNORED ME. WHY SHOULD HE SEND FOR ME TODAY?



BUT ALL THE SAME KALIDASA WENT TO THE COURT.

AS SOON AS BHOJA SAW HIM ENTER, HE ROSE FROM HIS SEAT AND RAN TOWARDS HIM.

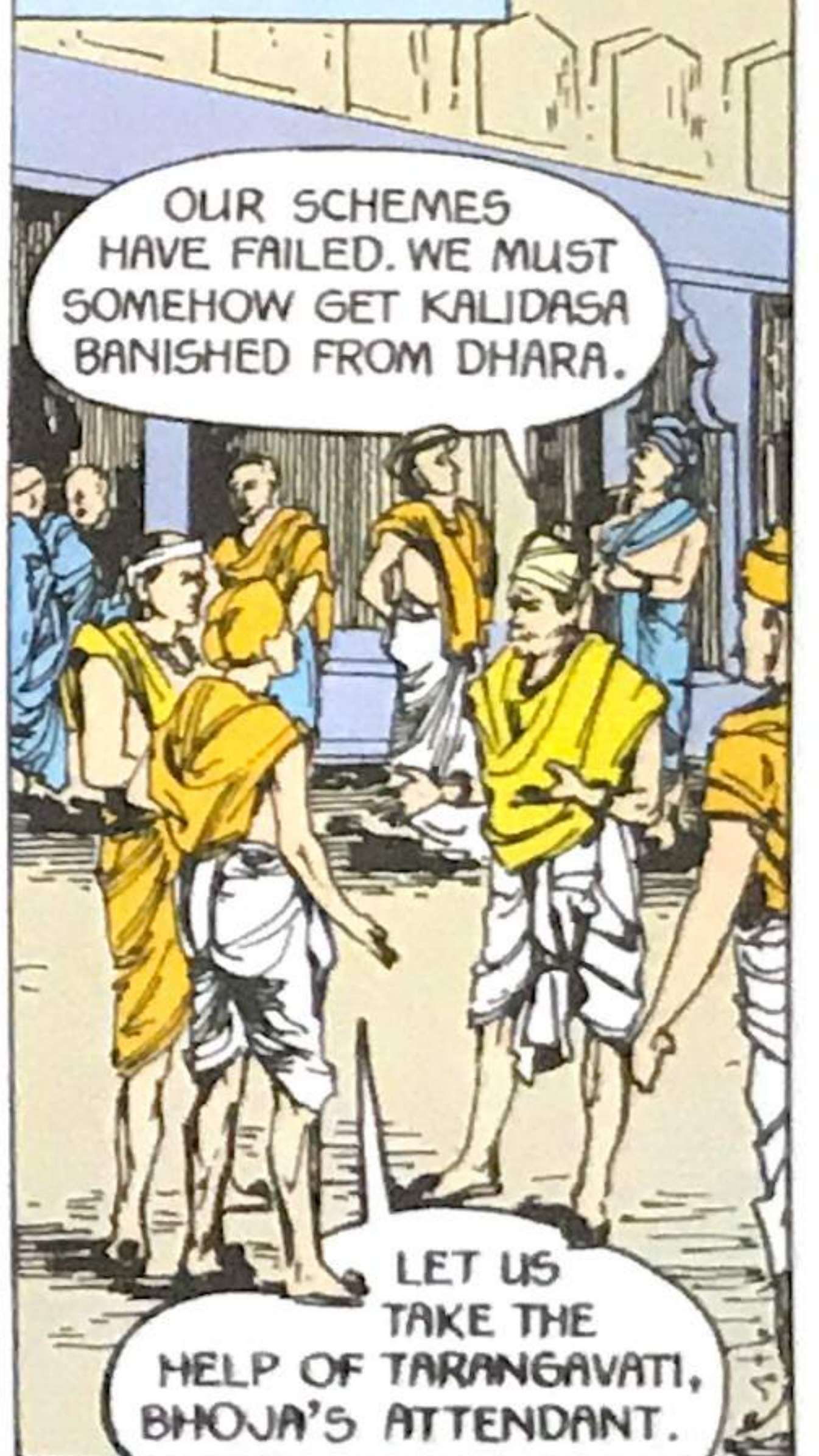
DEAREST POET! WHY ARE YOU SO LATE?



KALIDASA'S ENEMIES WERE LIVID WITH RAGE.

OUR SCHEMES HAVE FAILED. WE MUST SOMEHOW GET KALIDASA BANISHED FROM DHARA.

LET US TAKE THE HELP OF TARANGAVATI, BHOJA'S ATTENDANT.



SO THEY APPROACHED TARANGAVATI WITH GIFTS OF GOLD AND MONEY.



THAT NIGHT, WHILE TARANGAVATI WAS MASSAGING THE KING'S FEET AS HE SLEPT—

I AM FORTUNATE. THE KING IS ALONE.



A LITTLE LATER, THE KING STIRRED IN HIS BED.

AH! HE IS HALF AWAKE. THIS IS MY CHANCE.

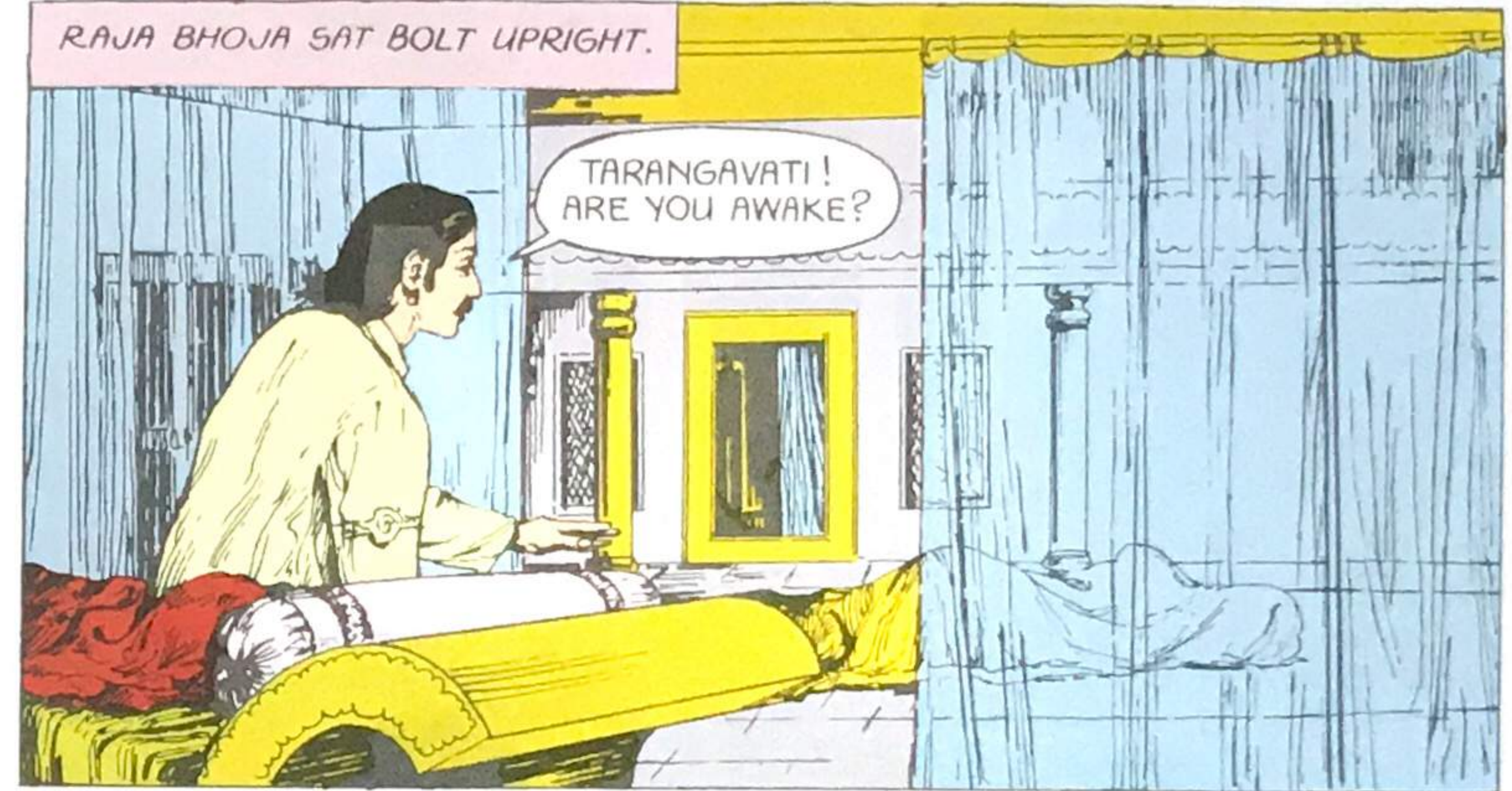


TARANGAVATI PRETENDED TO BE TALKING IN HER SLEEP.

THE EVIL KALIDASA DISGUISED AS A SLAVE-GIRL MEETS THE UNFAITHFUL QUEEN LILAVATI, SECRETLY IN HER APARTMENTS. IF EVER OUR GOOD KING KNEW!



RAJA BHOJA SAT BOLT UPRIGHT.



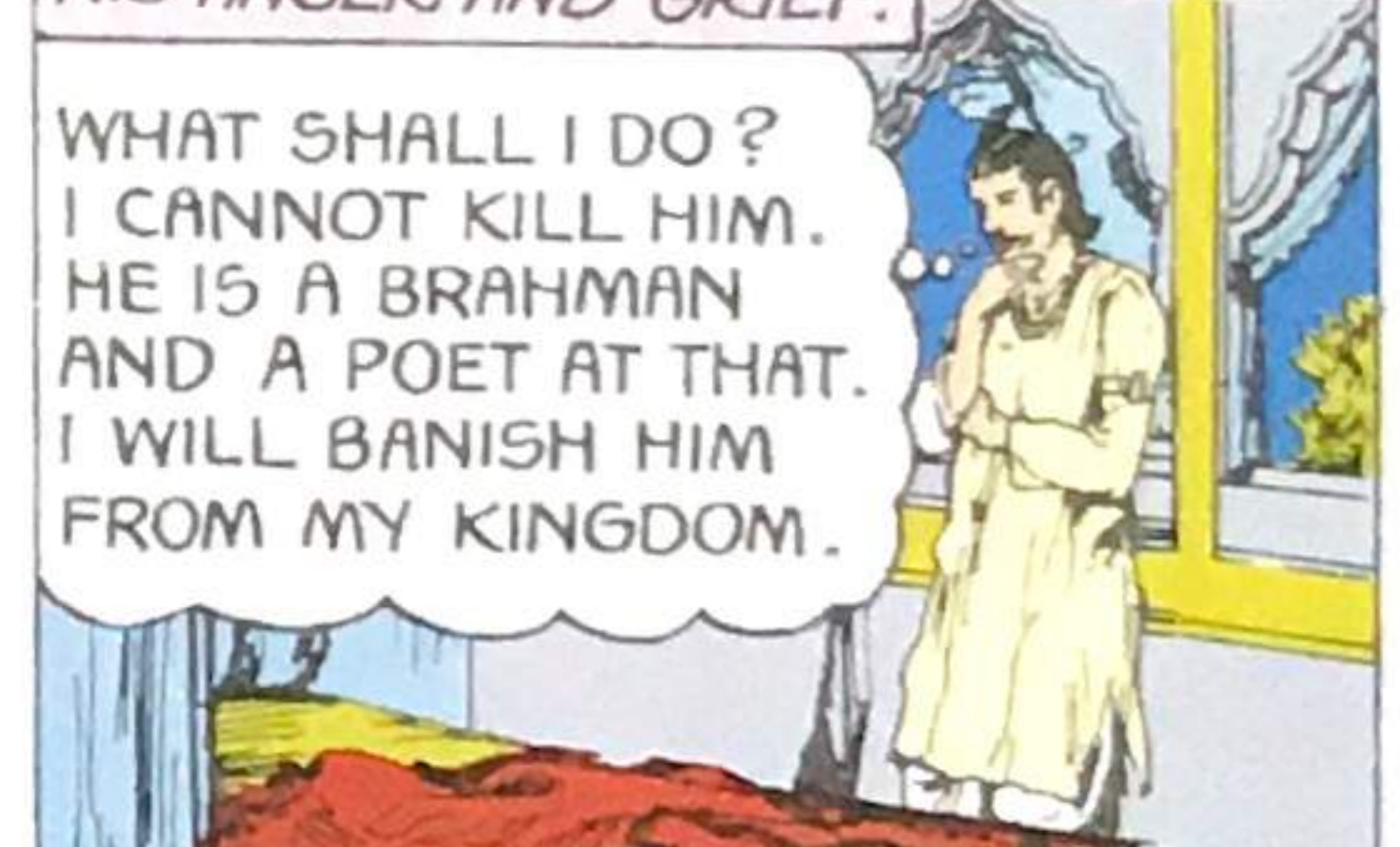
WHEN THERE WAS NO REPLY—

ALAS! MY QUEEN UNFAITHFUL TO ME! AND KALIDASA HER LOVER! NO NO!



RAJA BHOJA COULD NOT CONTAIN HIS ANGER AND GRIEF.

WHAT SHALL I DO? I CANNOT KILL HIM. HE IS A BRAHMAN AND A POET AT THAT. I WILL BANISH HIM FROM MY KINGDOM.



EARLY THE NEXT MORNING, HE SENT FOR KALIDASA.

LEAVE THE KINGDOM FORTHWITH. LET ME NOT SET SIGHT ON YOUR TREACHEROUS FACE AGAIN.



KALIDASA WAS HURT AND PUZZLED.

IT MUST BE THE WORK OF THE JEALOUS POETS. WELL! I SHALL SEE MY BELOVED, VILASVATI, BEFORE I GO.

AT VILASVATI'S HOME—



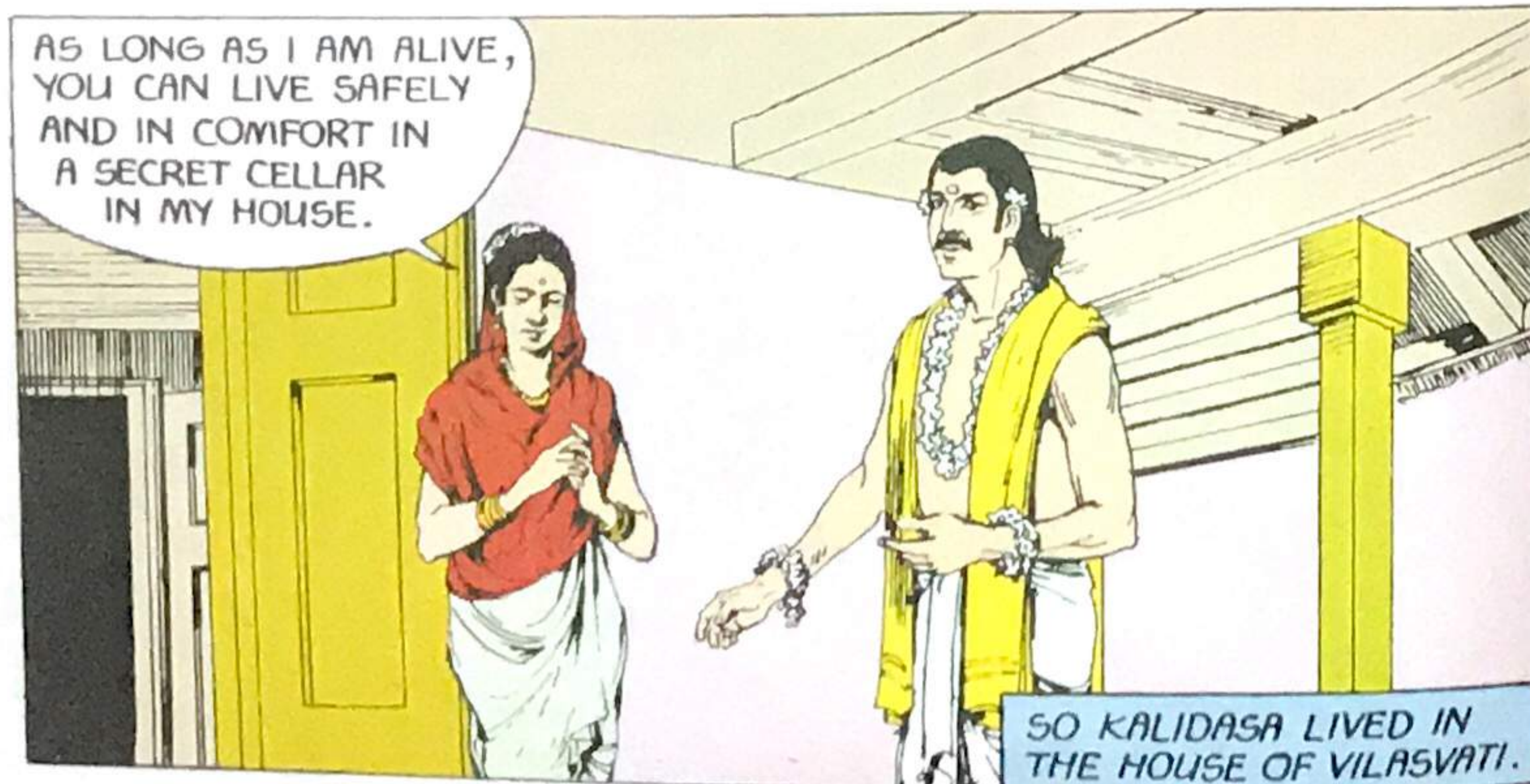
DEAREST ONE, THE KING HAS BANISHED ME. I HAVE COME TO TAKE LEAVE OF YOU.

BUT VILASVATI WOULD NOT LET HIM GO.

I AM YOUR FRIEND. WHEN YOU WERE THE KING'S FAVOURITE, I SHARED YOUR HAPPINESS. NOW THAT YOU ARE FALLEN FROM FAVOUR, I WILL NOT LET IT GO.

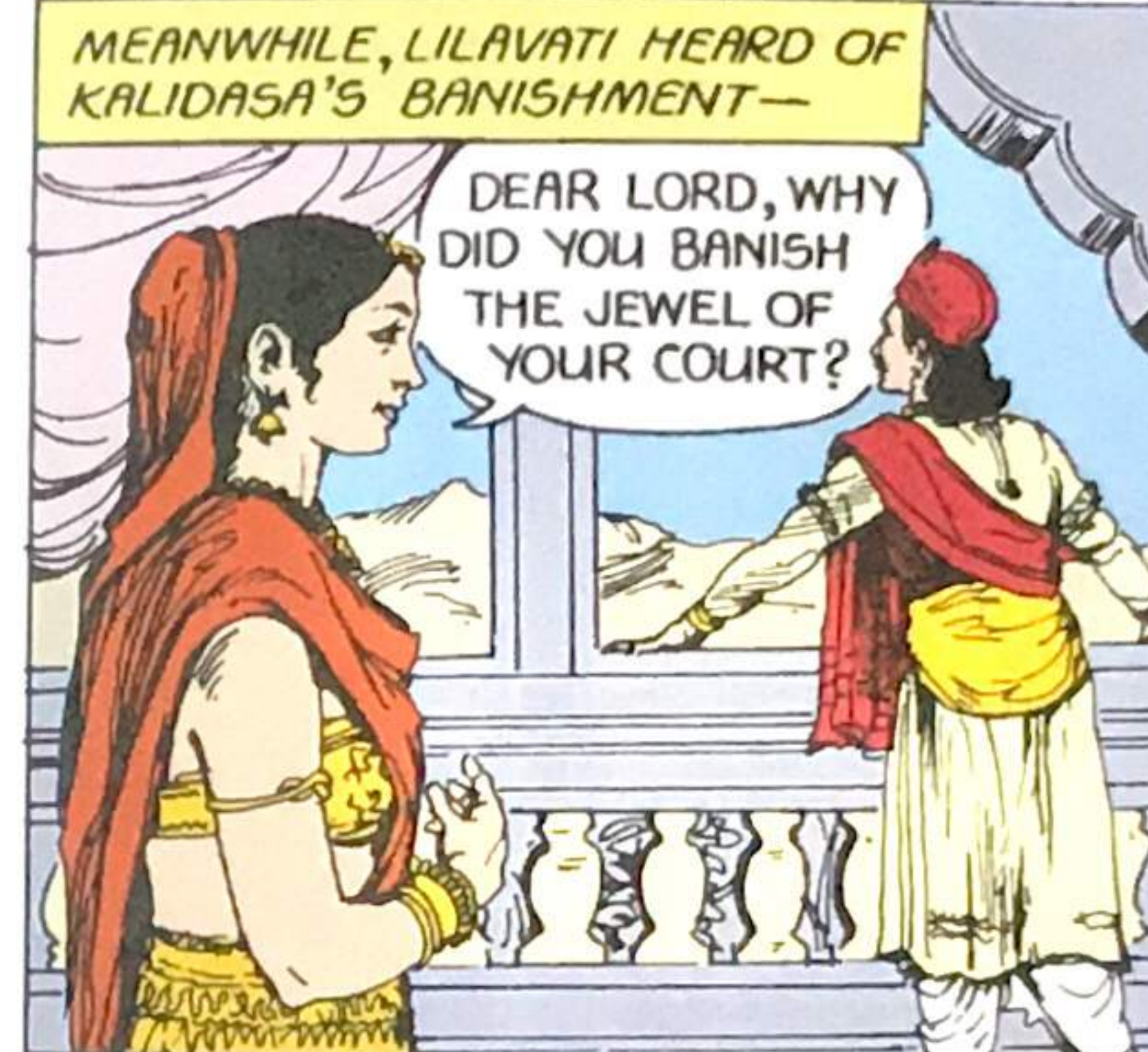


AS LONG AS I AM ALIVE, YOU CAN LIVE SAFELY AND IN COMFORT IN A SECRET CELLAR IN MY HOUSE.



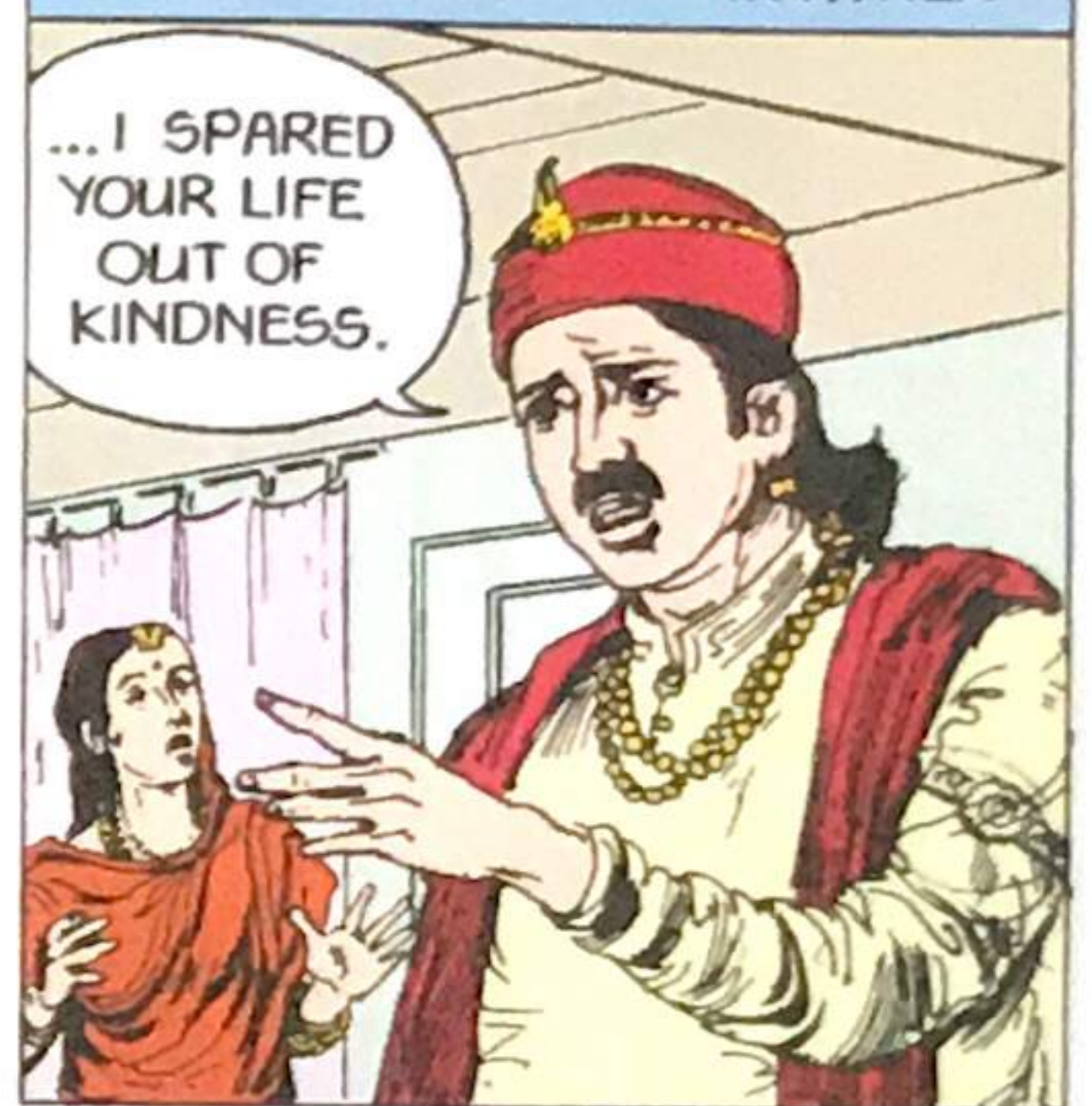
SO KALIDASA LIVED IN THE HOUSE OF VILASVATI.

MEANWHILE, LILAVATI HEARD OF KALIDASA'S BANISHMENT—



DEAR LORD, WHY DID YOU BANISH THE JEWEL OF YOUR COURT?

THE KING TOLD HER WHY. THEN—



...I SPARED YOUR LIFE OUT OF KINDNESS.

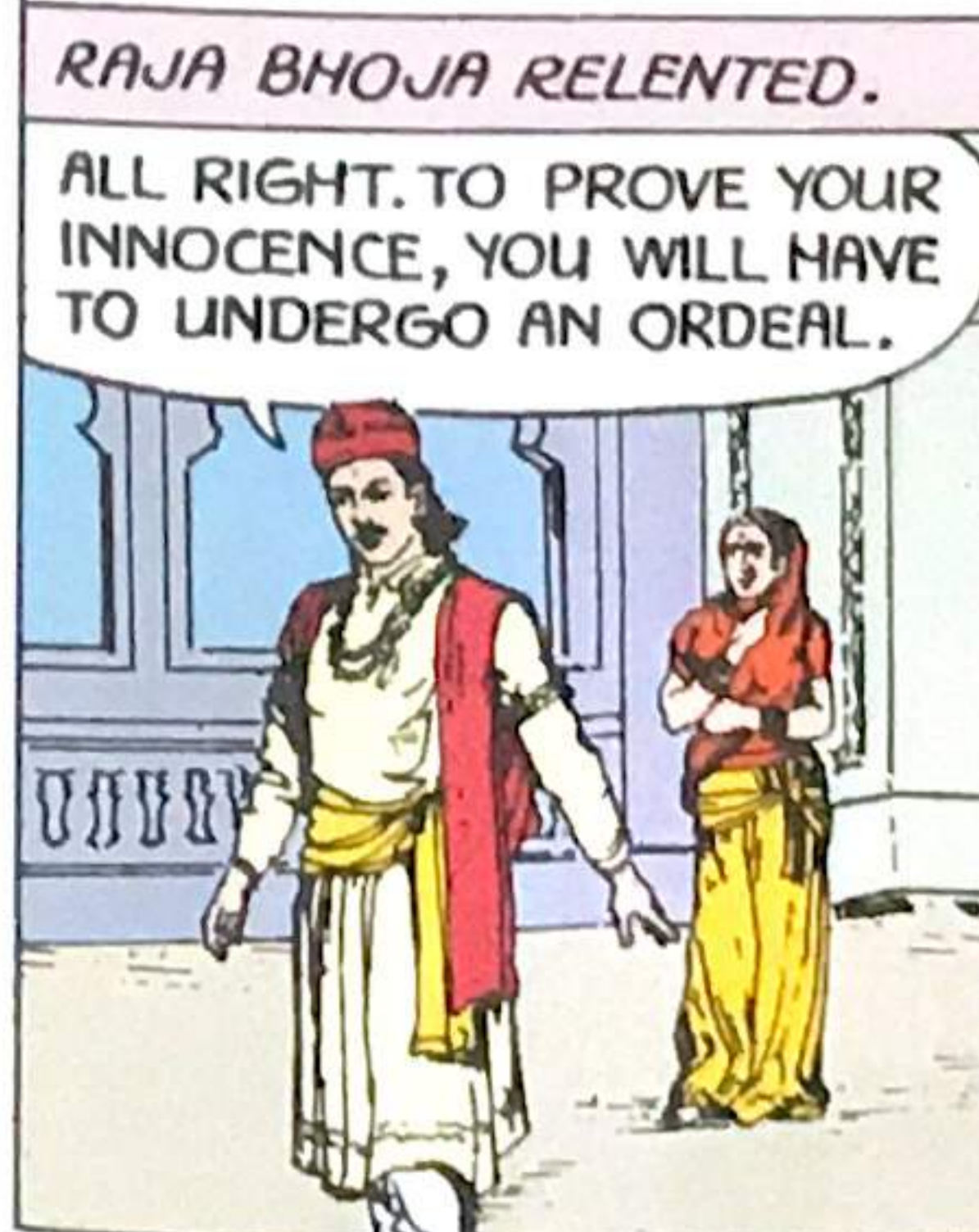
THE QUEEN LAUGHED SARCASTICALLY.

I AM INDEED FORTUNATE. IN ANY CASE I AM GOING TO KILL MYSELF, SINCE YOU HAVE NOT CARED TO FIND OUT WHETHER I AM GUILTY OR NOT.



RAJA BHOJA RELENDED.

ALL RIGHT. TO PROVE YOUR INNOCENCE, YOU WILL HAVE TO UNDERGO AN ORDEAL.



THE QUEEN, OF COURSE, CAME OUT UNSCATHED.

DEAR QUEEN, FORGIVE ME. MOST EVIL ONE THAT I AM!



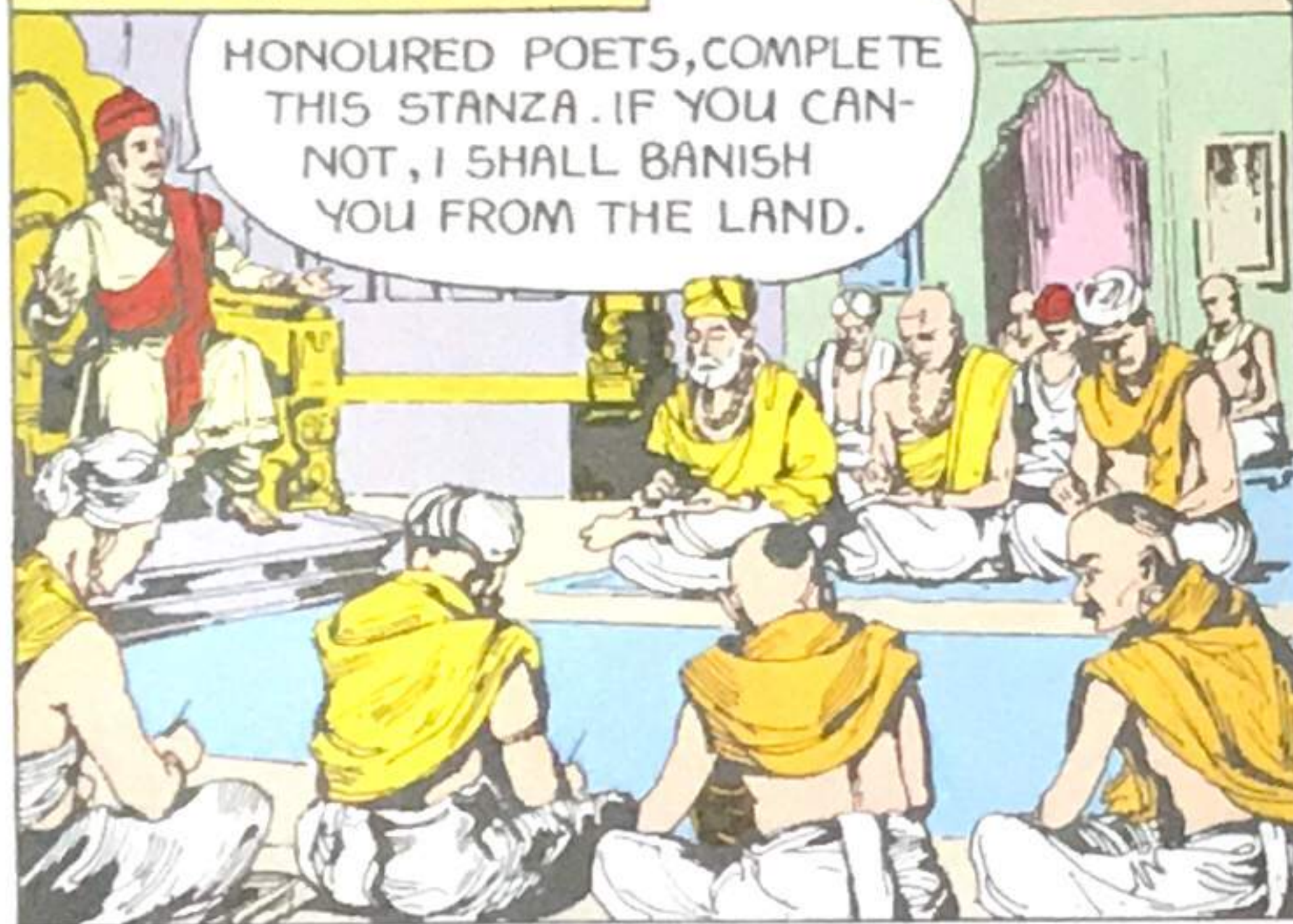
RAJA BHOJA NOW REPENTED FOR HIS UNJUST TREATMENT OF KALIDASA.

THERE IS NO POET LIKE KALIDASA. HIS WORDS OPEN UP MAGIC CASEMENTS ON WONDER AND BEAUTY. IN WHOSE FORTUNATE COMPANY ARE YOU, KALIDASA?



DAYS PASSED BUT THERE WAS NO NEWS OF KALIDASA. THEN ONE MORNING AT COURT, BHOJA HAD A BRILLIANT IDEA.

HONOURED POETS, COMPLETE THIS STANZA. IF YOU CANNOT, I SHALL BANISH YOU FROM THE LAND.



AND AFTER HE HAD GIVEN THEM THE INITIAL LINES —

AH! KALIDASA, BY THIS RUSE YOU SHALL EITHER BE VINDICATED OR DISCOVERED.



THE POETS TRIED DESPERATELY TO COMPLETE THE STANZA, BUT IN VAIN. AT LAST—

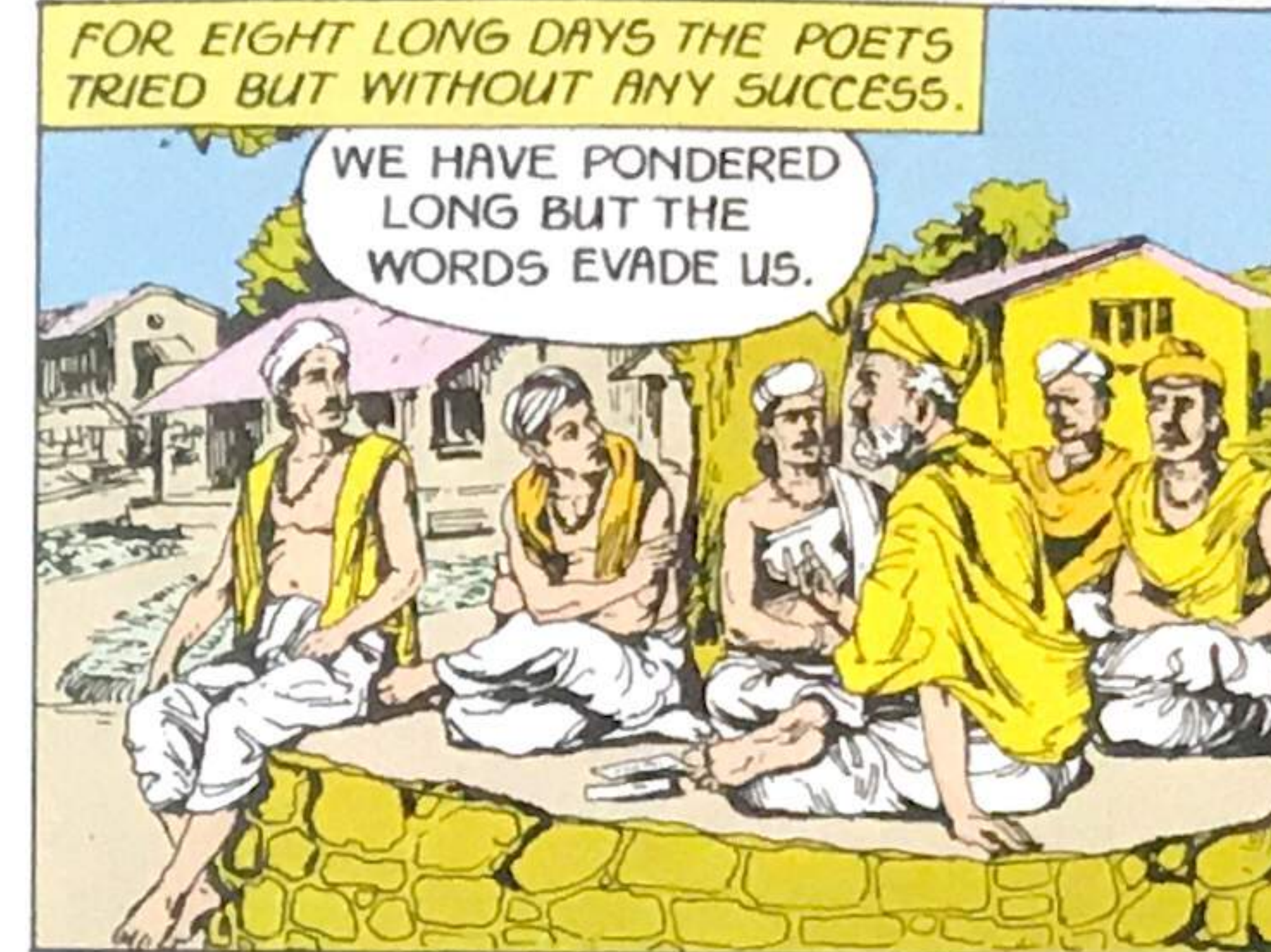
BANA, YOU ARE BHOJA'S FAVOURITE. GO TO HIM AND ASK FOR EIGHT DAYS' TIME.

I WILL.



FOR EIGHT LONG DAYS THE POETS TRIED BUT WITHOUT ANY SUCCESS.

WE HAVE PONDERED LONG BUT THE WORDS EVADE US.



BANA WAS THE FIRST TO ADMIT THEIR FOLLY IN GETTING KALIDASA BANISHED.

IF HE WERE HERE, WOULD WE BE IN THIS PLIGHT?

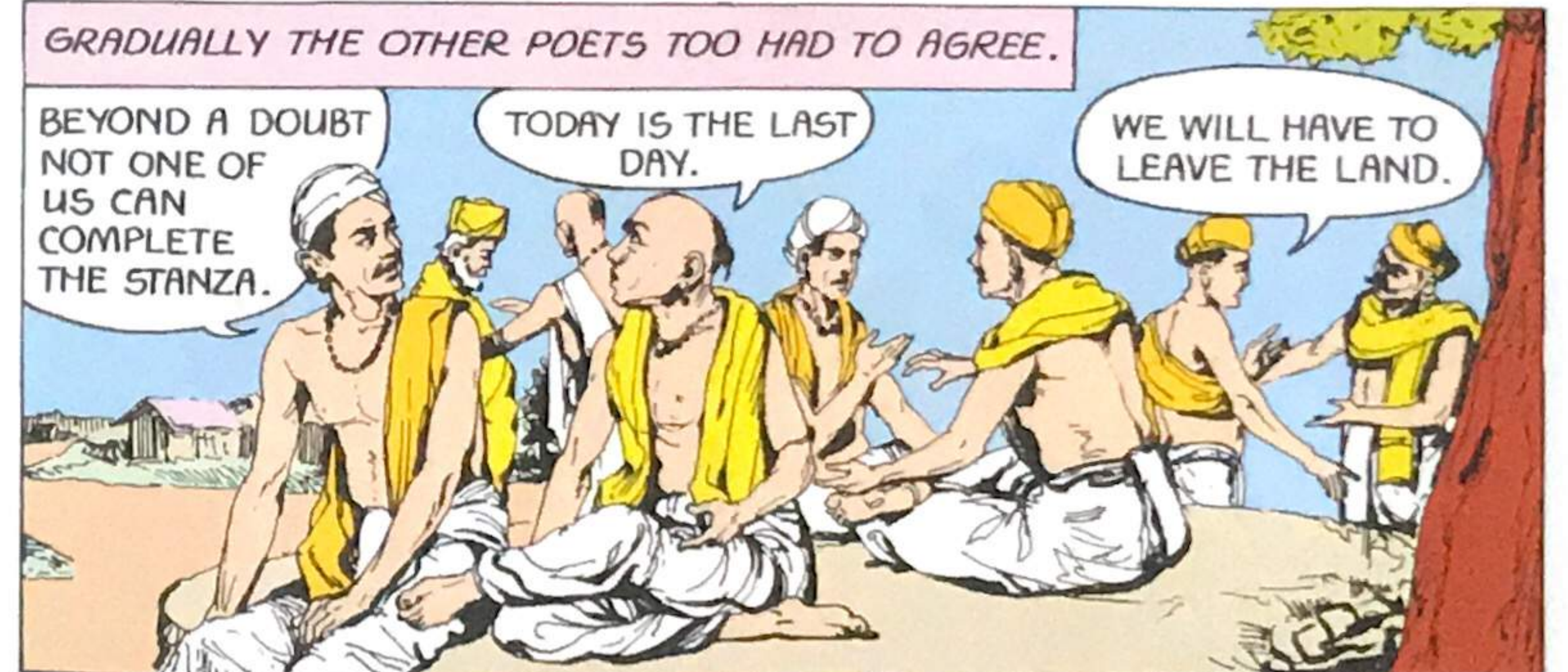


GRADUALLY THE OTHER POETS TOO HAD TO AGREE.

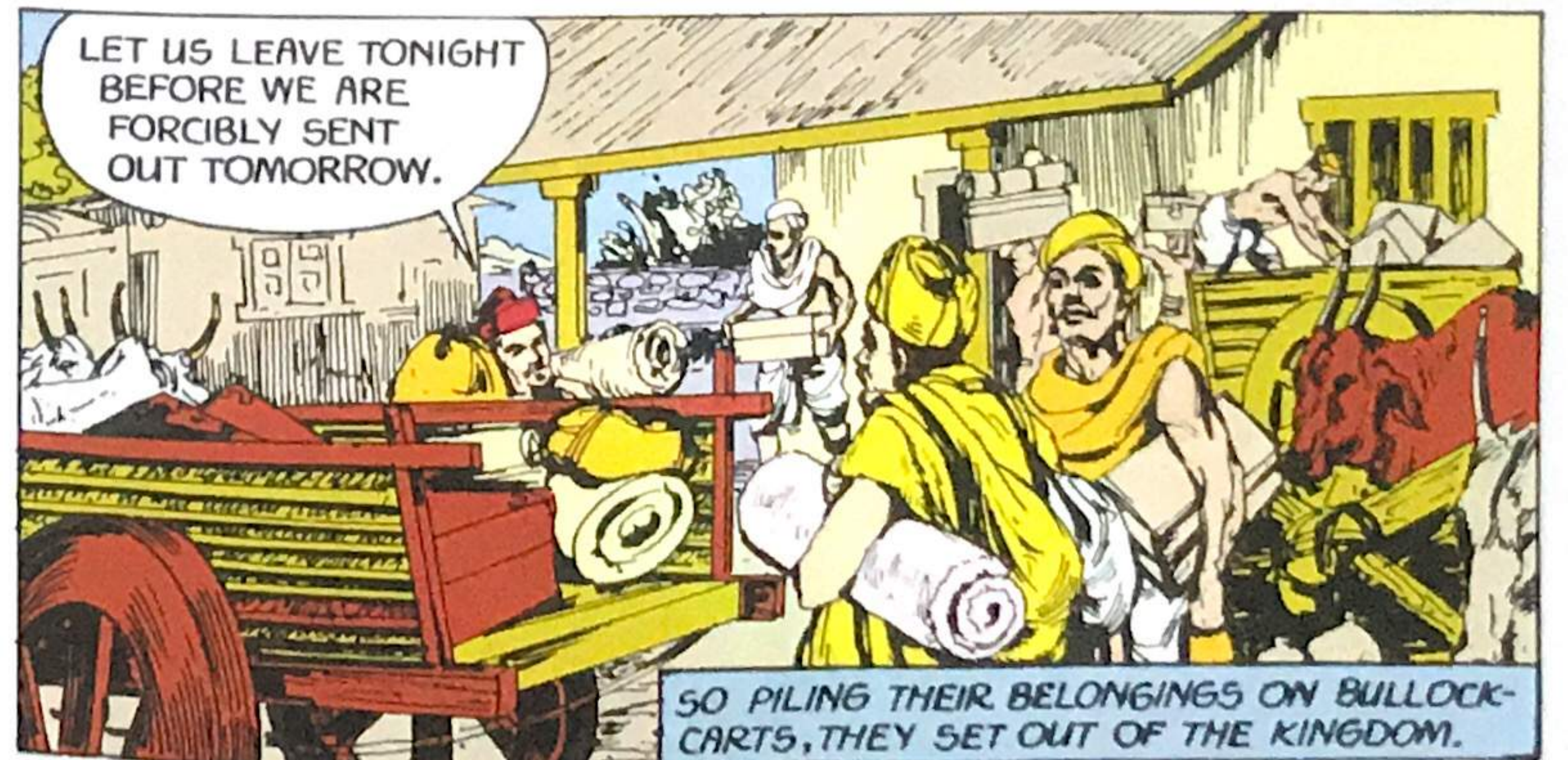
BEYOND A DOUBT NOT ONE OF US CAN COMPLETE THE STANZA.

TODAY IS THE LAST DAY.

WE WILL HAVE TO LEAVE THE LAND.



LET US LEAVE TONIGHT BEFORE WE ARE FORCIBLY SENT OUT TOMORROW.



SO PILING THEIR BELONGINGS ON BULLOCK-CARTS, THEY SET OUT OF THE KINGDOM.

AS THEY WENT DOWN THE ROAD, THEY HAD TO PASS VILASVATI'S HOUSE. KALIDASA HEARD THEIR VOICES.



WEARING THE DISGUISE OF A BARD, KALIDASA WENT TOWARDS THEM.



ONE AMONG THEM, GUESSING THAT HE WAS A BARD, HAD AN IDEA.

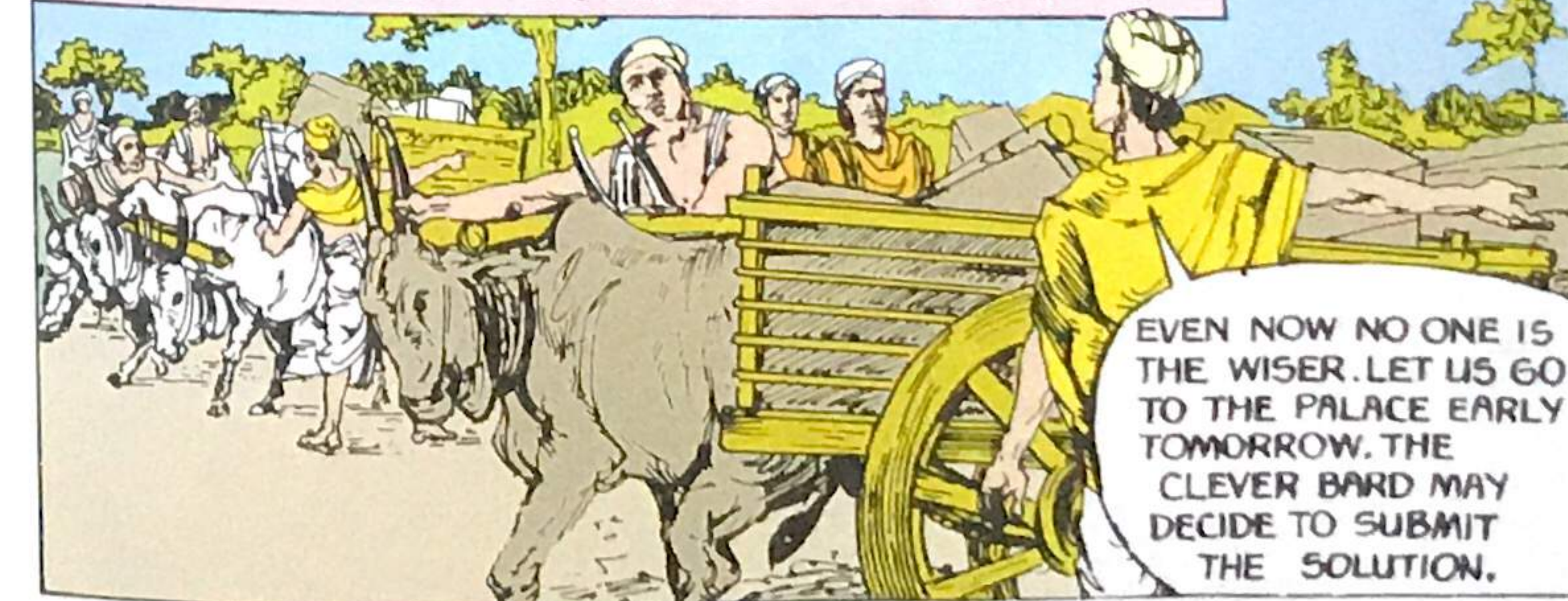
THE KING GAVE US A STANZA TO COMPLETE. WE COULD NOT DO IT. AFRAID OF THE KING'S WRATH, WE HAVE DECIDED TO LEAVE THE KINGDOM.



WHEN THE POETS GAVE THE LINES, KALIDASA EFFORTLESSLY COMPLETED THE STANZA AND TOOK LEAVE OF THE ASTOUNDED POETS.



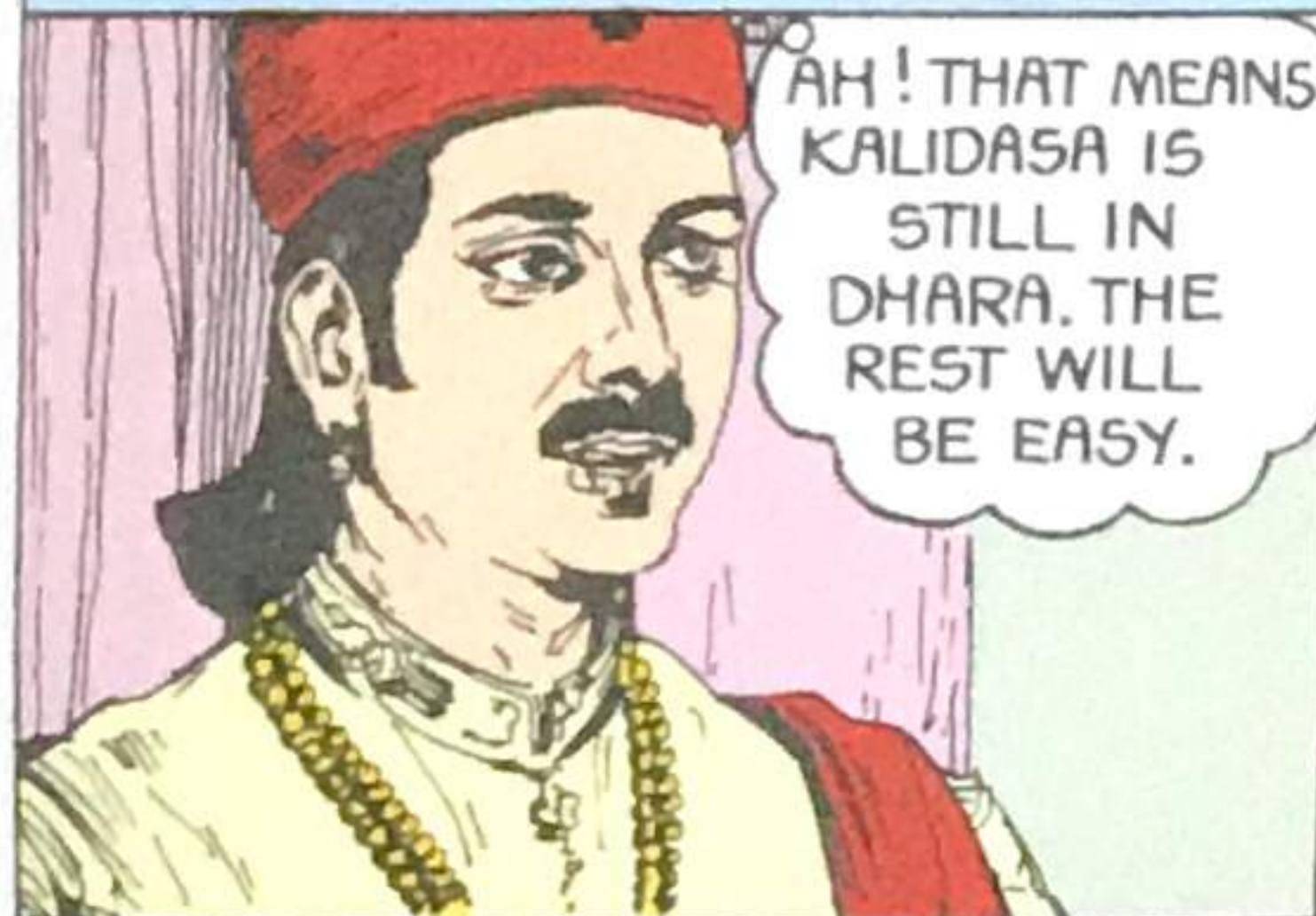
THE MORE PRACTICAL POETS PLANNED THEIR NEXT MOVE—



EARLY THE FOLLOWING MORNING, THE POETS LED BY BANA WENT TO THE COURT.



AS SOON AS BANA, THE LEADER, FINISHED RECITING THE STANZA—

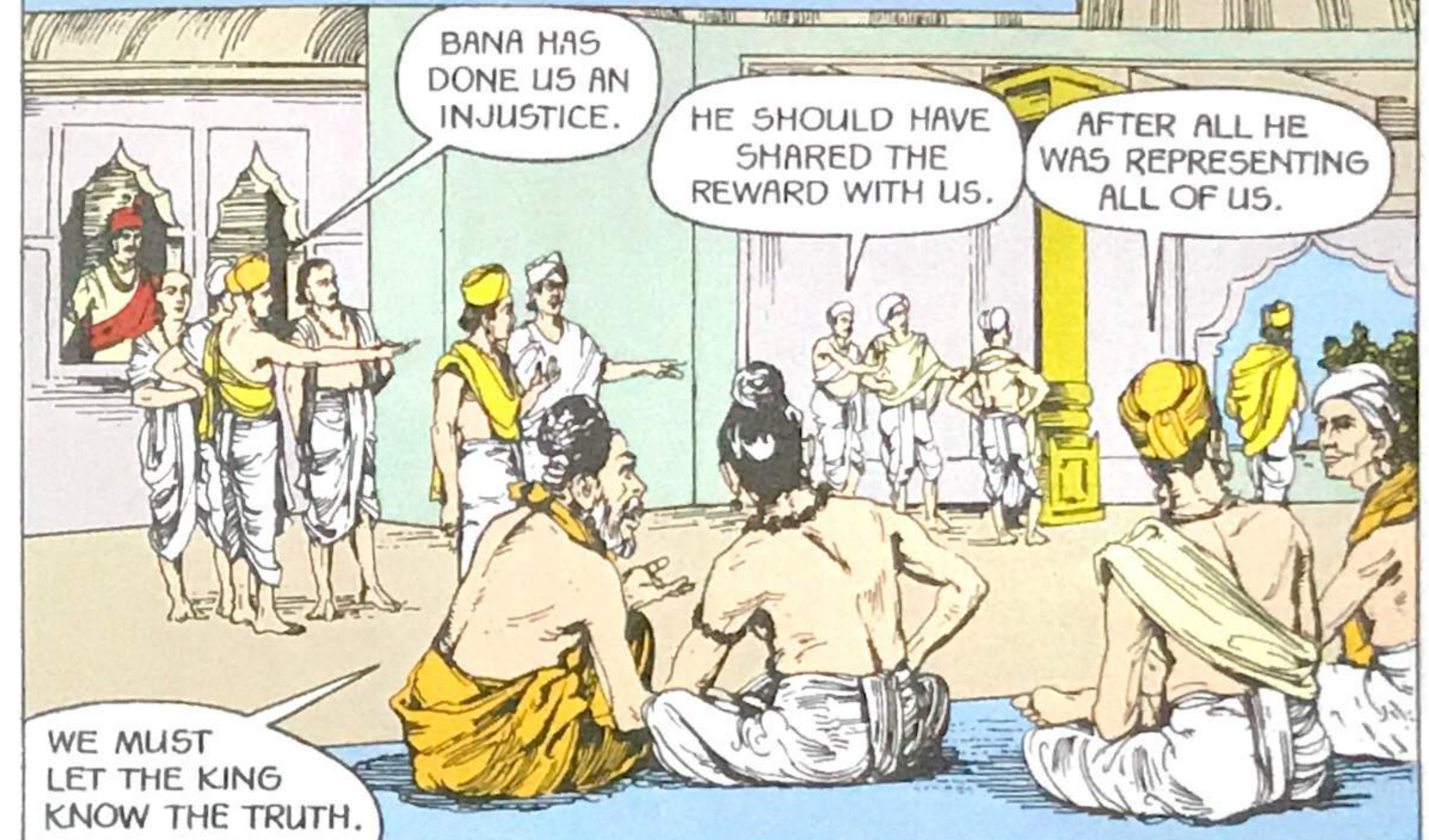


BHOJA GAVE BANA A REWARD, DELIBERATELY IGNORING THE OTHERS.

I AM PLEASED WITH YOU, BANA. YOUR REWARD SHALL BE 15 LAKH GOLD PIECES.



AS SOON AS BANA LEFT THE COURT WITH THE REWARD, THE REMAINING POETS WHISPERED AMONGST THEMSELVES.



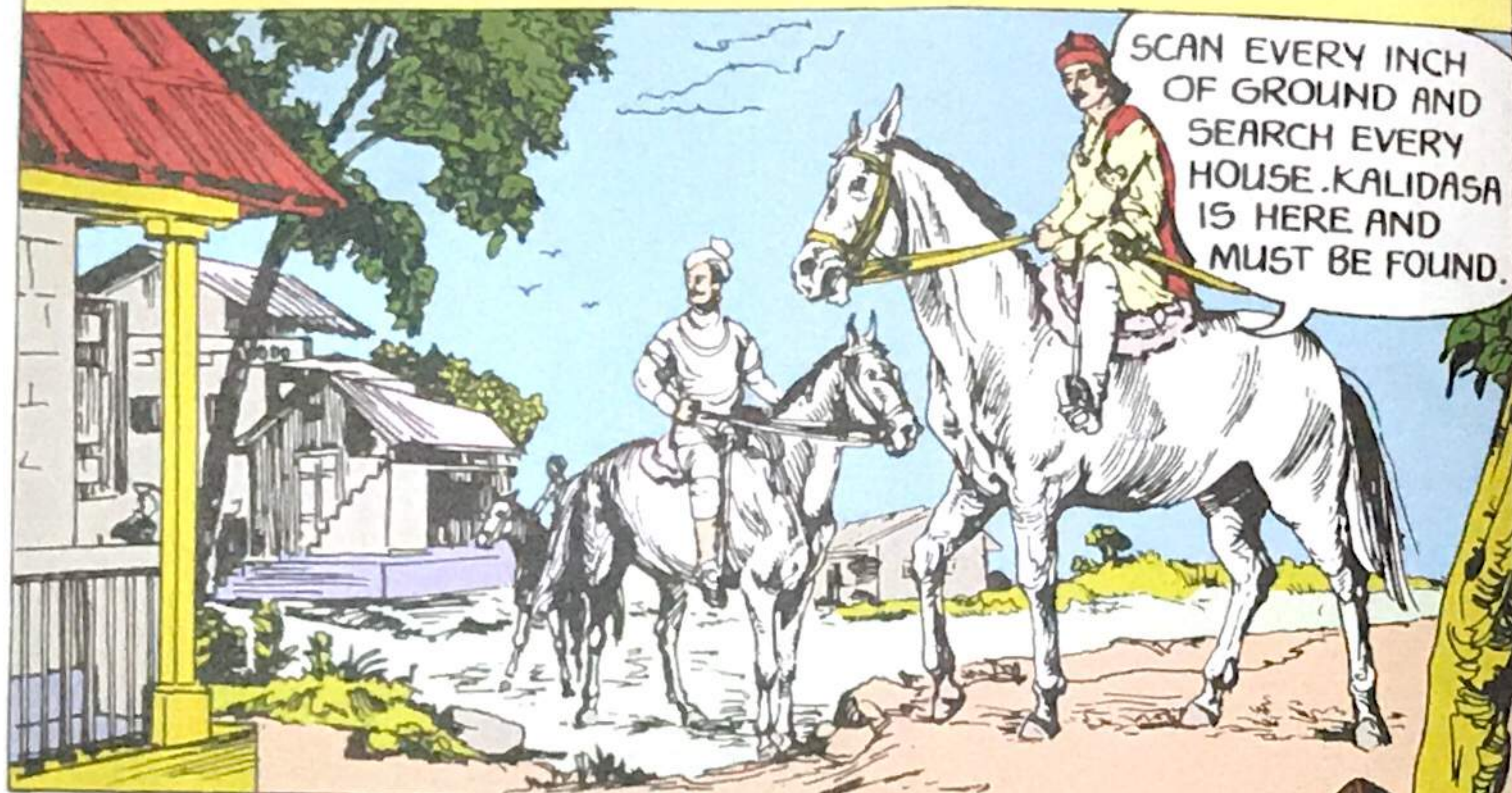
AND THEY TOLD BHOJA ALL THAT HAD HAPPENED THE PREVIOUS NIGHT.



BHOJA TURNED TO HIS GUARDS.



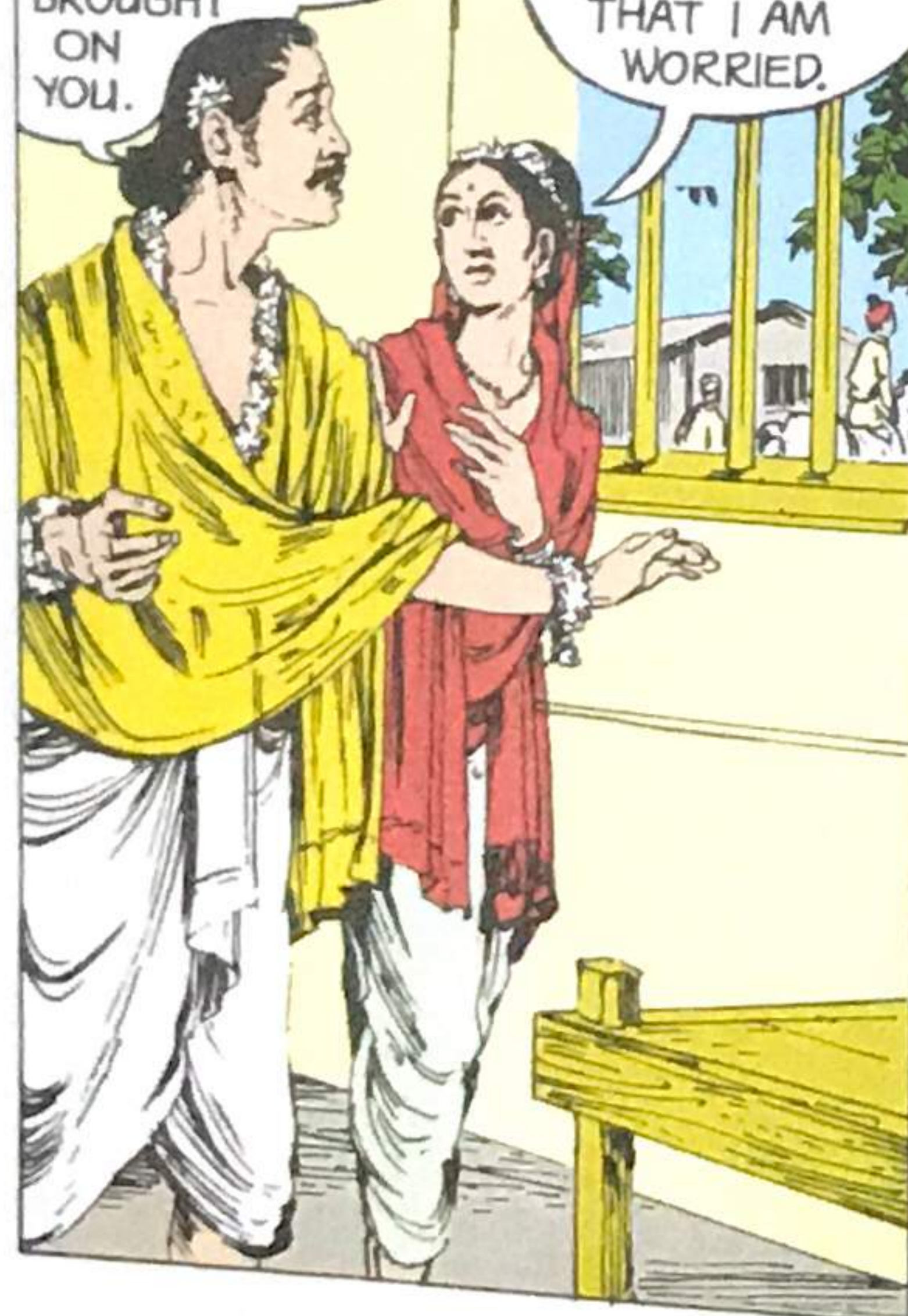
BHOJA RODE TO THE SPOT WHERE THE POETS HAD MET THE BARD.



MEANWHILE AT VILASVATI'S HOUSE—

ALAS! THE KING AND HIS MEN! SEE THE TROUBLE I HAVE BROUGHT ON YOU.

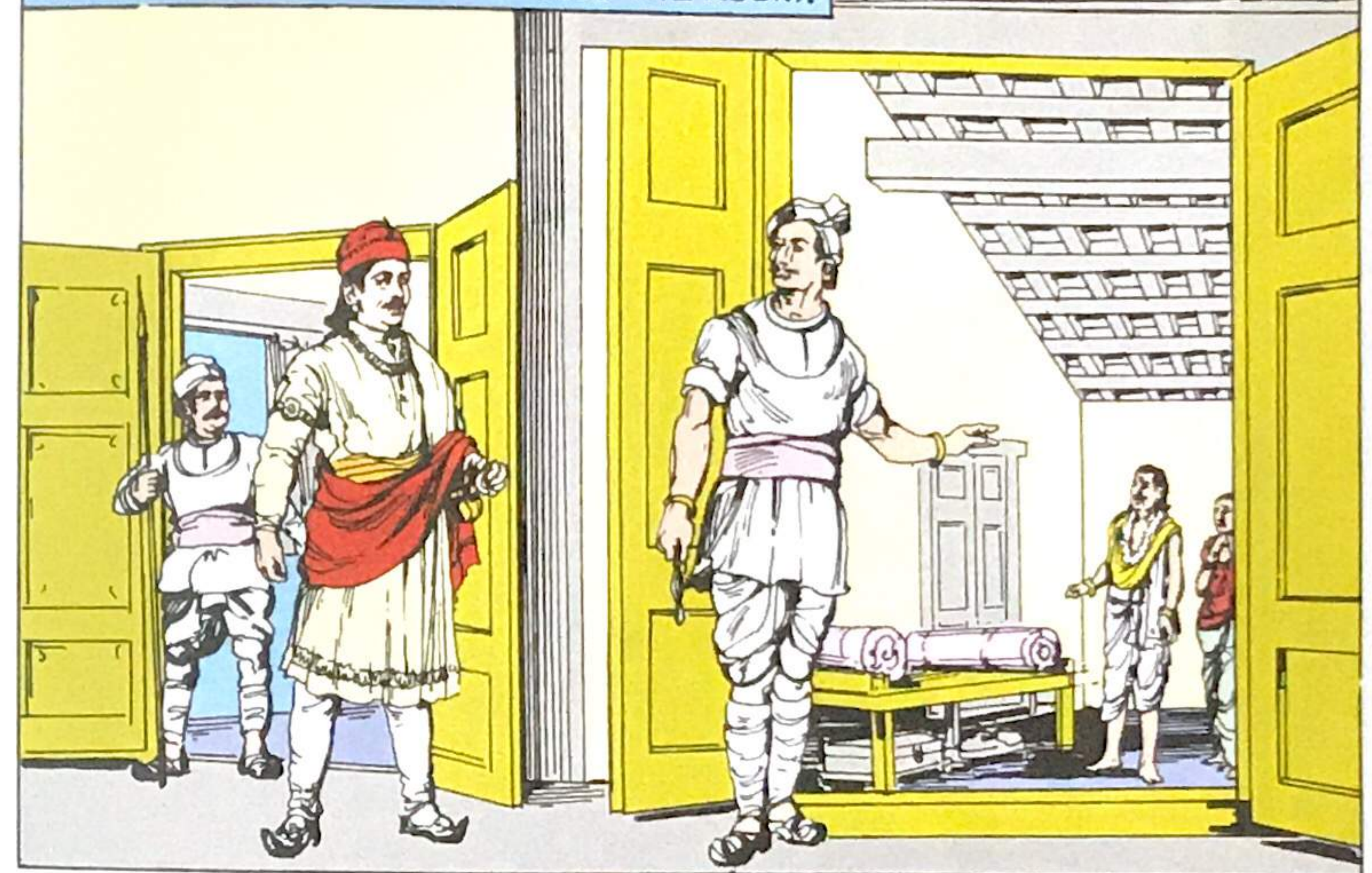
IT IS NOT SO MUCH ABOUT ME AS ABOUT YOU THAT I AM WORRIED.



DON'T WORRY, DEAREST. I AM SURE, WHEN BHOJA SEES ME HE WILL...



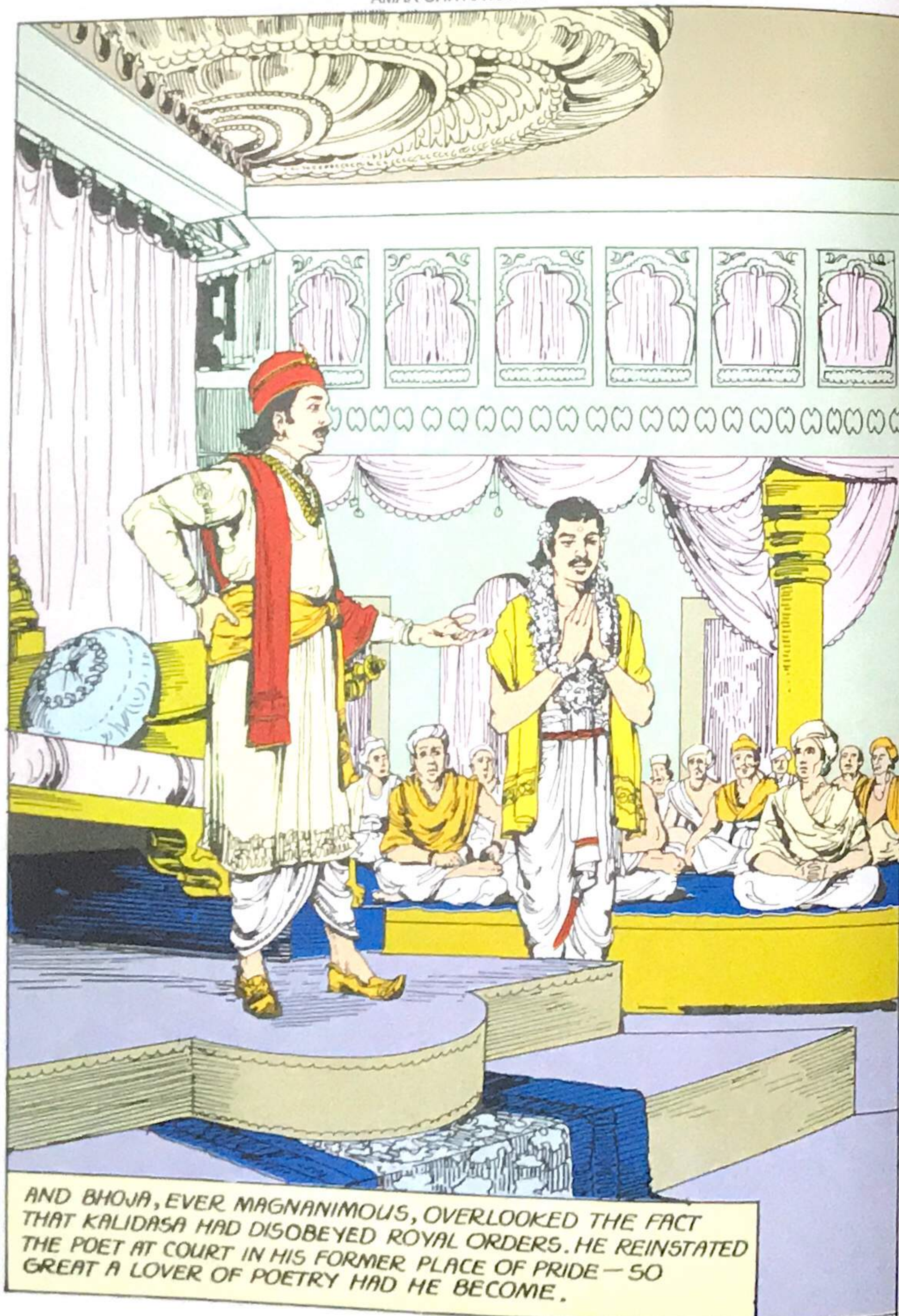
AT THAT MOMENT BHOJA ENTERED THE ROOM.



BHOJA! MY KING!

DEAR KALIDASA, I HAVE WRONGED YOU. FORGIVE ME. PLEASE SAY THAT YOU WILL RIDE BACK TO COURT WITH ME ON MY OWN HORSE.





AND BHOJA, EVER MAGNANIMOUS, OVERLOOKED THE FACT THAT KALIDASA HAD DISOBEYED ROYAL ORDERS. HE REINSTATED THE POET AT COURT IN HIS FORMER PLACE OF PRIDE — SO GREAT A LOVER OF POETRY HAD HE BECOME.

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